



Rounding Out an Ancestor's Story with State Census Records

Lauri Jean Swett
Genealogy by Lauri Jean

genbylj@gmail.com
on Facebook as Lauri Jean
genbylj.wordpress.com

Census records place an ancestor in a specific place and time, provide identifying information, and point out relatives and neighbors. Multiple states conducted censuses on a regular basis. Learn how to find and use these records to round out an ancestor's story.

=====

Why Use State Census Records?

All census records, including state censuses, place an ancestor at a specific place on a specific date. They provide answers to predetermined questions that vary by census year. Censuses provide information about an ancestor's household, even the tick-mark censuses.

State censuses were typically taken on different years and ask different questions than federal censuses. This can fill in the 10-year gaps between federal censuses and the 20-year gap between the 1880 and 1900 US censuses. Many ask about a veteran's service; some include detail unit assignments. State censuses may provide names for the lost children who are only a number on the 1900 and 1910 federal censuses.

Finding State Censuses

Genealogy websites may have indexes, images, or both for state census records. On Ancestry.com, search the card catalog using the name of the state and "censu*" for the title. The asterisk will provide collection titles with census and censuses in the name. In FamilySearch.org, click search then records and use the name of the state and start typing the

© Lauri Jean Swett

word census until the autofill shows census collections. For [MyHeritage.com](https://www.myheritage.com), click on the “research” tab and select collection catalog. In the search field, type the name of the state and the word “census.”

The [FamilySearch Wiki](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki) has information and tables on state census records. The wiki provides what years censuses were taken, which counties were included, and information on record access. Search by state name and the word “census.” Information for the federal censuses appears first. Scroll down to “Online State and Territorial Censuses.” Continue scrolling as “Other Census Images” may be listed that apply to an ancestor.

State historical societies, state archives, and state libraries could have online finding aids for their state’s censuses. They may also have indexes, digital images, and microfilm of these records. One of these should house the originals. The exact repository will vary by state. A web search by state name and the word census should identify which repositories and websites have these materials.

Using State Censuses Records

1. Start with the census records you have already found for your person of interest. Analyze each one for the information it contains and does not contain. Compare the information between census records. Creating a table may be helpful.
2. Determine which state censuses were taken for your ancestor’s time and place. Pinpoint which locations your ancestor should have resided for the available records.
3. Search the indexes. The index may be for a specific census year or multiple years may be included in a single index.
4. When an ancestor refuses to be found, get stubborn.
 - Use spelling variations, add or remove search fields, or search on a different website.
 - If available, use city directories, newspapers, land records and county histories to confirm their location.
 - Determine if changes in borders and name changes may affect the location(s). At one point, Iowa had only two counties, Dubuque and Des Moines. Today, it has 99 counties.
 - You may need to look at the actual census images. This may require using microfilm, the FamilySearch catalog, or a different website. Expect the handwriting to be hard to read. Image quality varies between websites.
5. Analyze the new records found. Modify the census table or create a new one. When conflicts between censuses occur, take the time to resolve these issues. Use proof statements and summaries for minor conflicts. Develop proof arguments for major conflicts.

6. Develop next steps. What new questions may have come to light as you analyzed and compared the census records? Create a research plan to discover more about this ancestor. Or, choose another relative to find in state census records and repeat this process.

Do not forget to write up your analysis, correlation, and conclusions.

What Will State Censuses Reveal?

It depends on the ancestor's time and place. Each state decided when to take censuses and what questions to ask. The questions asked will probably vary by year. Some of the questions that have been asked include

- Military information down to the company level
- Immigration and naturalization
- Where did they move from
- Birth county within this state
- Education obtained
- Disabilities
- Parents' birth places
- Years of residence in this state
- Religion
- How many books in the home

School Censuses

States may have taken **school censuses**. Arizona, Oklahoma, and South Dakota did. This record type records school age children and their parents or guardians. Search the FamilySearch Wiki or the state repositories under school records to determine availability.

Who Will You Find?

Choose an ancestor and review previously located census records. Create a table and analyze the information. Determine which censuses need to be uncovered. Find them. Analyze them. See where the new records lead. Enjoy the journey.

Lauri Jean Swett

Genealogy by Lauri Jean
genbyLJ@gmail.com
on Facebook as Lauri Jean
genbylj.wordpress.com