

CENSUS RESEARCH CHECKLIST

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR FAMILY HISTORIANS

Use this checklist each time you examine a census record.
The more details you collect, the more stories you can uncover!



Every detail is a clue.
Every clue tells a story.

1

LOCATE YOUR ANCESTOR

- ☐ Search by name, age range, and location.
- ☐ Try variations of the name (spelling, nicknames, initials).
- ☐ Check neighbors and relatives on the same page.

2

RECORD ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

- ☐ Full name of each household member
- ☐ Relationship to head of household
- ☐ Age or birth date
- ☐ Birthplace (person & parents) when listed
- ☐ Year of immigration & naturalization status when listed

3

EXAMINE HOUSEHOLD DETAILS

- ☐ Home ownership or rental
- ☐ Farm or urban dwelling
- ☐ Value of home or farm
- ☐ Number of rooms
- ☐ Number of families in household
- ☐ Number of children born / Number still living (1900, 1910)
- ☐ Neighbors and their occupations

4

REVIEW OCCUPATION & EMPLOYMENT

- ☐ Occupation and industry
- ☐ Employer or self-employed
- ☐ Months unemployed (if listed)
- ☐ Workplace location
- ☐ Veteran or military service codes (when asked)

5

CHECK ADDITIONAL COLUMNS

- ☐ Marital status & years married
- ☐ Ability to read & write
- ☐ School attendance
- ☐ Naturalization papers filed / status
- ☐ Military service (Civil War, WWI)
- ☐ Disability (if listed)
- ☐ Radio ownership (when asked)
- ☐ Telephone (when asked)

6

LOOK FOR CLUES & CONNECTIONS

- ☐ Compare ages to other records
- ☐ Look for missing family members
- ☐ Note changes over time
- ☐ Identify patterns in occupations, locations, and neighbors
- ☐ Look for in-law or extended family in nearby households

7

DOCUMENT YOUR FINDINGS

- ☐ Record census year, enumeration district, page & line
- ☐ Save or print the image
- ☐ Cite your source properly
- ☐ Add notes about inconsistencies or questions

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK:

- ☒ All available U.S. federal censuses (1790–1950)
- ☒ Siblings may be in different households
- ☒ Women may be listed with maiden names
- ☒ Children may be with relatives, not parents
- ☒ Names may be misspelled or misheard
- ☒ Neighbors today may be relatives tomorrow!

CENSUS YEARS AT A GLANCE

1790–1840	Heads of household named; others tallied
1850–1860	Free persons named
1870–1880	Household members named
1890	Mostly destroyed; fragments survive
1910	Children born & living
1920	Immigration year, naturalization status
1930	Veteran status, radio
1940	Informant identified; SSN status for sample
1950	Veteran status, more detailed info

GOOD RESEARCH TODAY
CREATES DISCOVERIES FOR TOMORROW.

PRO TIPS:

- ★ Start with a known census and work both forward and backward in time.
- ★ Use a research log to track what you've found.
- ★ Be patient—small details lead to big discoveries!

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REMEMBER:

A census is a snapshot
in time—never the
whole story.
Use it to build the
bigger picture!