CENSUS RESEARCH
WITH FAMILYSEARCH AND HERITAGEQUEST

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I. Getting ready

You will want to locate your target family in every census. Not only did each census ask different questions, but census responses are notoriously unreliable for several reasons. Until the 1940 census, we have no indication who the informant might have been that provided the household's information to the census enumerator—it might have been the head of household, one of the children in the household, or possibly even a neighbor. The enumerators filled in the information as they heard it, frequently recording errors in spelling or in facts. Respondents had various reasons for providing inaccurate information, from over- or under-estimating their age to concealing their place of birth.

Be sure to collect every bit of useful information from each census. Preparing a transcription of each census is well worth the time and effort. Note all the details about location: street address, post office, city ward. Read every column in the census. The date of the enumeration is an important clue to estimating birth dates; an individual recorded as 48 years old on 12 August 1900 would have been born between 13 August 1852 and 12 August 1853. Comparing ages and enumeration dates across several censuses can narrow a birth date down significantly. It's also useful to note the names of neighbors—it was common for families to live near each other, and neighbors may turn out to be cousins or in-laws (whose records may hold the answers to your research questions).

II. Searching the Census

FamilySearch has indexes to all the federal census population schedules available online, but you can only access census images on the FamilySearch site for 1940, 1900, 1870, and 1850 (including the 1850 Mortality Schedule and the 1850 Slave Schedule). For other census years FamilySearch provides a link to the image on ancestry.com or fold3, but you will not be able to view these images without a subscription to the partner site. HeritageQuest, available for free on your home computer through your local public library website (you will need a library card) has a terrible index, but can boast the best census images of any online service. You will need to use both services to complete your research if you don't already subscribe to one of the fee services: you will need to locate the family using FamilySearch, then view the actual census image on HeritageQuest.

A. How to locate an individual on FamilySearch

Search Tips

1. Use as few search terms as possible.
2. Use date ranges rather than exact dates for birth year.

3. Search only those fields that have been indexed.

Available search terms vary with each census; examine a sample entry to determine what search terms have been indexed. Be flexible in your search: you don't *have* to search by a particular individual's name. A sibling with an unusual name may be easier to find. Sometimes simply searching in a known location for a person of a certain age, gender, and birth place, leaving both given and surnames blank, may be necessary. Consider how the names might have been misunderstood, misspelled, or incorrectly indexed. Refer to the FamilySearch Spelling Substitution Table (see the FamilySearch wiki) for suggestions on alternate spellings to look for.

Wildcards

The * replaces any number of characters, can be used several times within one field, and can occur at the beginning or end of a word (not both).

  examples: *m*n*r or *ick or ni*l*

The ? replaces a single character, and can be used in combination with the *.

  examples: marg?ret or ni*l?s

Narrowing Search Results

Choose the Collections Tab to view the categories of results, and select only those categories of interest. Narrow results further using the Filters; particularly valuable is the Residence filter, that allows you to narrow results to a single state and then examine the distribution of results within the state before selecting a particular county.

B. How to locate the census image on HeritageQuest

To locate an image on HeritageQuest, first find the index entry for the individual on FamilySearch. You will need to copy information from the FamilySearch index to the HeritageQuest Search fields to locate the correct census image.

Method 1: FamilySearch lists "nara roll number" or "nara film number"

a) Select "Find by Page Number" on the HeritageQuest "Search Census" screen.

b) Select the census "Series" on HeritageQuest (for example, 1880-T9).

c) Enter the "Roll" number. If the FamilySearch index entry does not include the term "nara roll number," then look for the term "nara film number"—the number that follows the hyphen is the roll number (the leading alphanumeric code is the NARA series designation, such as T9 for the 1880 census).

d) For "Page" enter the "page" or "sheet number" from the FamilySearch index entry. (Do not enter the letter designation A, B, C, or D.)

e) Click "Search" and an image will open in HeritageQuest. This may or may not be the image you need: in some censuses, a single page number has multiple pages (1A, 1B, etc.). Check the "page character" designation (A, B, C, D) on the FamilySearch index entry, and click through the Images returned on HeritageQuest to locate the correct image.

f) The "family" or "household" number listed in the Source Citation at the bottom of the FamilySearch index entry may *sometimes* help you locate your target household on the

page, but frequently the FamilySearch citation is incorrect so you may need to scan the entire page to locate the individuals you are searching for.

Method 2: No Roll number is listed in the FamilySearch index entry.
   a) Select "Advance Search" on the HeritageQuest "Search Census" screen.
   b) Begin with the fewest number of search terms possible that returns a manageable number of search results. At a minimum you will want to include the Census year, State, and County as listed in the FamilySearch index.

> i. To enter the County name, you must click "Browse" and locate the HeritageQuest standard form of the county name from the list that opens (use "Jump" to quickly locate the name in the list).
>
> ii. Searching by "Location" can sometimes be tricky, as the location name may include ward numbers or other identifiers that make the HeritageQuest indexed spelling hard to guess.

   c) HeritageQuest only indexes the head of household—don't bother trying to search for any other member of the household. Enter the name of the head of household as listed in the FamilySearch index. If you have no luck searching by the given name and surname, then leave those fields blank and search with the age, sex, and race fields as given in the FamilySearch index.
   d) Examine the list of results to locate the household that best matches the FamilySearch index entry.
   e) You may need to click through several of the SubPages returned by HeritageQuest to find the household. The Family Number listed in the FamilySearch index may help.

III. Additional tips

A. Jumping the 1880-1900 gap when the target in 1900 was in an unknown 1880 household

1. Each family is a unique collection of individuals. Use the data gathered about the target to locate possible households where the target might have been a child in 1880. Censuses from 1900-1940 should have given you information about the target's birth year and birth place, occupation, and parents' places of birth.

- Mapping the locations of the various potential 1880 households can help narrow the list of likely households. Generally, families tended to stay in certain areas or migrated along logical paths (railroads, major rivers, canals, or roads). "Generally" does not mean always, and be ready for your family to be the exception!
- Note the names of neighbors enumerated before and after your target's household in the later censuses, and compare them to the neighbors of possible 1880 target households. When families migrated, they often travelled with other members of their community.

2. Once you locate a likely family for your target in 1880, trace other members of that family *forward* to the 1900 census, to see if you can find clues that confirm that you have identified your target in the correct family.

B. Create a timeline for your target

Use all the dates and locations from the target's parents' and children's records to track the target through time.

Use a spreadsheet or Tables in a word-processing program so that you can sort your data. Formatting you dates as "yyyy.mm.dd" (for example, 1875.09.06) makes it possible to sort events chronologically in a word-processing program. Formatting geographic locations as "state,county,town" allows you to sort events by geographic location. If your timeline includes other countries, you may want to include the country name or abbreviation in your location names.

Example:

Date	Location	Event	Source	Comments
1831	Bavaria	birth of Nicholas	1880 census	
1843.12	Germany	birth of Agusta (mother)	1900 census	mother-in-law in Rudolph hsd
1859	US, New Jersey	birth of Agusta (daughter)	1880 census	
1867	US, New Jersey	birth of Katherine	1880 census	
1868	US, New Jersey	birth of Mamie	1880 census	
1869	US, New York	alternate birth of Katherine	1910 census	
1869.09	US, New Jersey	alternate birth of Katherine	1900 census	
1880.06.04	US, New York, Kings, Brooklyn	residence Nicholas Fick (father of Katherine)	1880 census	215 N. 5th St.
1900.06.09	US, New York, Kings, Brooklyn	residence Katherine Fick Rudolph	1900 census	265 Hooper