The 1950 US Census: Are You Ready?

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Many genealogists remember the excitement in April 2012 during the release of the 1940 US Census. Following the "72 Year Rule" for records at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the results of the 1950 US Census will be made public on Friday, April 1, 2022. It's never too early to prepare for this valuable data!

Why is the 1950 US Census Important?

- Keep in mind that the US Federal Census is mandated by the US Constitution to be taken every 10 years to apportion seats in the House of Representatives. Like other record sets, the US Census was not created for genealogy purposes, but as genealogists we benefit greatly from the data.

- The 1950 US Census is the first decennial census conducted after World War II. The war had a huge social and economic impact on the United States. Some of the questions asked are due to a) a severe economic recession in 1947, b) a post-war housing shortage with men and women who fought in World War II returning home, c) many women employed to support the war effort returned to keeping house full time, and d) a shift in population away from rural locations and towards urban and suburban areas.

How was the 1950 US Census Different?

Here are some quick facts you might now know about the 1950 US Census data:

- The population schedule for the 1950 US Census consisted of 30 lines with six individuals selected for Supplemental Questions. In the 1940 US Census, each page of the population schedule had 40 lines and only two selected.

- Americans living abroad were enumerated for the first time in 1950. This included efforts to enumerate armed forces, ship crews and United States government employees living overseas.

- The first non-military computer–UNIVAC I–was used to tabulate census data.

- The 1950 US Census covered 150 million residents across 45 million homes.

- For those who lived in hotels and "other places where transients usually pay for quarters" took place the night of April 11, 1950. In addition, many newspapers carried "missed person" forms at the end of the enumeration period. These forms could be clipped, filled out and returned to the Census Bureau.

- Special "infant cards" were completed by enumerators of the 1950 US Census for each child born in January, February, or March 1950. These were used to test birth registration completeness for recent births. However, these cards were destroyed after the information was used for statistical purposes. The cards were never microfilmed and as a result, there are no digital images.

Questions Asked on the 1950 US Census

- Name of street, avenue, or road where the household is located
- Home or apartment number
- Serial number of dwelling unit
- Is this house on a farm (or ranch)?
- Name (head of household)
- Relationship to head of household
- Race
- Sex
- How old was this person on his last birthday?
- Is this person now married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married?
- What State or country was the person born in?
- If foreign born, is the person naturalized?
- What was this person doing most of last week - working, keeping house, or something else?
- If the person was "keeping house" or "something else" in question 15, did the person do any work at all last week, not counting work around the house?
- If the person answered "no" to question 16, was he looking for work?
- If the person answered "no" to question 17, even if he didn't work last week, does he have a job or business?
- If the person was working, how many hours did he or she work in the last week?
- What kind of work does the person do?
- What kind of business or industry is the person in?
- Class of worker the person is.

What You Need to Know About the 1950 US Census Data Release

Here is the latest information as of January 2022:

- NARA, FamilySearch, and Ancestry will employ a rudimentary artificial intelligence (AI) program with optical character recognition (OCR) to "scan" the hand-written entries. An initial index will be created, and users can submit corrections to build a crowd-sourced index.

- Only the **1950 US Census Population Schedules** have been microfilmed and digitized; these will be made available on April 1, 2022.

- Genealogy vendors (Ancestry, MyHeritage) will likely outsource indexing while FamilySearch will use volunteers to build an index. For the 1940 US Census release, 150,000 volunteers indexed 132 million names in less than four months. The current estimate for the 1950 US Census using volunteers is six months.

- To determine the correct Enumeration District and browse the correct set of images, **you need to know where your ancestor or relative lived on April 1, 1950**, which was Census Day for the 1950 US Census.

- With that address, you can use the **Unified 1880-1950 Census ED Finder** at the Steve Morse One Step site to locate the correct Enumeration District for urban and suburban locations.

- For rural addresses, you can use the **Viewing 1950 Enumeration District Maps** tool at the One Step site to access the maps and a visual review will be needed.

How to Prepare for the 1950 US Census Data

- Locate the April 1, 1950, address for ancestor or relative: cover resources such as newspapers, correspondence, city directories, address books

- Use the **Steve Morse One Step** website to locate Enumeration Districts. For rural addresses, the One Step site will point you towards the Enumeration District maps to review visually.

- Create a spreadsheet or list of each person, basic info and their 1950 US Census Enumeration District.

- Use this information once the census data is released on April 1, 2022.

Here's How You Can Get 1950 US Census Data NOW

Not many genealogists realize that the Census Bureau offers what is known as the **Age Search Service** (https://www.census.gov/topics/population/genealogy/agesearch.html) allowing residents to see census data for a fee. From the Census Bureau site:

> "We will search the confidential records from the Federal population censuses of 1910 to 2010 and issue an official transcript of the results (for a congressionally mandated fee). NOTE: Information can be released only to the named person, his/her heirs, or legal representatives."

Currently the fee is $65 for a search of **one census per person** and payment can be made by check or money order (no credit cards accepted). The application form will ask you to list an address for the research subject. Remember that locating the proper enumeration district will help speed up the search. Normal processing time is three to four weeks; for an extra $20 fee you can expedite the process.

1950 US Census Substitute

So, what if you need 1950 US Census data for others? The best substitute available would be a city directory for the location where your research target lived. Ancestry has created a **1950 Census Substitute** consisting of entries from US city directories up to 1955. See https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/1950census/ for more information and to start searching.

Resources

- **1950 US Census – United States Census Bureau**
  https://www.archives.gov/research/census/1950

- *1950 Census Release Will Offer Enhanced Digital Access, Public Collaboration Opportunity* – National Archives
  https://www.archives.gov/news/articles/1950-census-access

- **1950 Census Substitute** – Ancestry
  https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/1950census/

- **1950 Census Questionnaire** – United States Census Bureau
  https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/questionnaires/1950_1.html

- **1950 Instructions to Enumerators** – IPUMS
  https://usa.ipums.org/usa/voliii/inst1950.shtml

- **1950 Instructions to Enumerators** – United States Census Bureau
  https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/census_instructions/1950_instructions.html

- **1950 US Census Overview** – United States Census Bureau
  https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1950.html

- **Age Search Service** – United States Census Bureau
  https://www.census.gov/topics/population/genealogy/agesearch.html

- **Ancestry® to Apply Handwriting Recognition Artificial Intelligence to Create a Searchable Index of the 1950 U.S. Census**
  https://www.ancestry.com/corporate/blog/ancestry-apply-handwriting-recognition-artificial-intelligence-create-searchable-index-1950-us

- **Finding Transcribed ED Descriptions for 1950 in One Step** – Steve Morse
  https://stevemorse.org/ed/ed.php?year=1950&state=AL&keywords=

- **Getting Ready for the 1950 Census: Searching With and Without a Name Index**
  https://stevemorse.org/census/1950census.htm

- **How to Access the 1950 Census in One Step** – Steve Morse
  https://stevemorse.org/census/quiz1950.php

- **Infant Card 1950 Census** – United States Census Bureau
  https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/04198170ch2.pdf

- **Miscellaneous Codes 1950 Census** – Steve Morse
  https://stevemorse.org/census/mcodes1950.htm

- **Occupation Codes 1950 Census** – Steve Morse
  https://stevemorse.org/census/1950occupationcodes.html

- **Project 1950 – Volunteers Needed**
  https://stevemorse.org/census/project1950intro.html

- **The 1950 Censuses – How They Were Taken – United States Census Bureau**
  http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1950/proceduralHistory/1950proceduralhistory.zip

- **US Census of Population: 1950** – Hathi Trust
  https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/mb?a=listis;c=1986287266

- **Unified 1950 US Census ED Finder** – Steve Morse
  https://stevemorse.org/census/unified.html?year=1950

- **United States Census** – FamilySearch Wiki
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Census

- **United States Census 1950** – FamilySearch Wiki
  https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Census_1950

- **Viewing 1940/50 Census Tracts in One Step** – Steve Morse
  https://stevemorse.org/census/tracts.html

- **Viewing 1940/1950 ED Descriptions from T1224 Microfilm in One Step**
  https://stevemorse.org/census/eddef1224.html?year=1950

- **Viewing 1940/1950 Wards, Tracts, and Block Maps in One Step** – Steve Morse
  https://stevemorse.org/census/1940-1950blocks.html

- **Viewing Enumeration District Maps in One Step** – Steve Morse
  https://stevemorse.org/census/arc1940-1950edmaps.html?year=1950