

Introduction to Genealogy at the National Archives

How do I begin?

Start with yourself. Compile as much information as you can about yourself and your family. Include as many names, places and dates as possible. Ask your relatives about the family. They may have stories or documents that can help you with your research.

Census Records, 1790-1930:

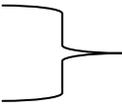
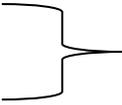
The Federal Population Census has been taken every 10 years, beginning in 1790. The National Archives has the census schedules on microfilm available from 1790 to 1930. (Note: Most of the 1890 Census was destroyed in a Department of Commerce fire, though partial records are available for some states.) There is a 72-year restriction on access to population census schedules, which is why 1930 is the latest year currently available.

Census records can provide the building blocks of your research, allowing you to both confirm information, and to learn a lot more. From 1790-1840 only the head of household is listed, (along with the number of household members in different age groups). However, beginning with 1850, details are provided for all individuals in households.

Depending upon the census year, some of the information that the records may provide includes:

- the names of family members
- their ages at a certain point in time
- their state or country of birth
- their parent's birthplaces
- year of immigration
- their street address
- marriage status and years of marriage
- occupation(s)
- value of their home and personal belongings
- the crops that they grew (in [agricultural schedules](#)), etc.

Census Records

- 1790–1930
- Taken every 10 years.
- Access restricted for 72 years after the census was taken.
- Arrangement
 - Year
 - State
 - County
 - Enumeration District
- Availability
 - Microfilm
 - Within NARA facilities
 - Large libraries
 - Online
 - www.ancestryinstitution.com
 - www.heritagequestonline.com
 - www.footnote.com all free within NARA facilities
- Indexes
 - 1790–1870, with some exceptions, available in book form
 - 1880–1930, with some exceptions, soundexed on microfilm
 - CD Roms
 - Online
 - www.ancestryinstitution.com
 - www.heritagequestonline.com
 - www.footnote.com all free within NARA facilities

Immigration (Ship Passenger Lists), 1800-ca. 1957:

The National Archives has immigration records, also known as "ship passenger arrival records," for arrivals to the United States between 1800 and 1957. Records for most ports begin in 1820. Philadelphia arrival records begin in 1800 and New Orleans arrival records begin in 1813. Records are arranged by port of arrival. (Pre-1820 records for other ports may be on file at the port of entry or at the state archives in the state where the port is located.)

Immigration records may provide genealogists with information such as:

- one's nationality, place of birth
- ship name and date of entry to the United States
- age, height, eye and hair color
- profession
- place of last residence
- name and address of relative they are joining in the U.S.
- amount of money they are carrying, etc.

Military Service and Pension, 1775-1902:

The National Archives holds Federal military service records from the Revolutionary War to 1912 in the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. Military records from WWI - present are held in the National Military Personnel Records Center (NPRC), in St. Louis, Missouri.

The most commonly requested military-related records used by genealogists are: Compiled Military Service Records, Pension Applications and Pension Payment Records, and Bounty Land Records. These records can often provide valuable information on the veteran, as well as their family members. For example:

- Compiled service records will provide you with your ancestor's rank, unit, date mustered in and mustered out, basic biographical information, medical information, and military information.

- Pension application files usually provide the most genealogical information. These files often contain supporting documents such as: narratives of events during service, marriage certificates, birth records, death certificates, pages from family Bibles, letters received from the veteran while in service, depositions of witnesses, affidavits, discharge papers and other supporting papers.
- Bounty land records, from claims based on wartime service between 1775 and March 3, 1855, often contain documents similar to those in pension files. Many of the bounty land application files relating to Revolutionary War and War of 1812 service have been combined with the pension files.

There is no simple explanation for how to begin research in military records. Your research path will depend on aspects such as: what branch of service your ancestor was in, which conflict, what dates, whether Regular Army or a volunteer unit, whether your ancestor was an officer or enlisted personnel, and whether there was a pension application.