

The 1940 Census – Census of Housing

Narrator: The Census of Housing will provide for the first time a complete record of housing in America. Taken at the same time as the Censuses of Population and Agriculture, this Census of Housing will record the conditions of the nation's homes, their characteristics and conveniences, and will record many other important facts for practical study and planning. The Census of Housing will include the homes of all the people enumerated on the population schedule, whether in a single family house, an apartment, a residence above a store, or any other normal dwelling unit, whether in the city, in a village, or in the open country. In addition, places not intended for habitation but in which people are living must be enumerated. And this includes such unusual places as stables, fruit sheds, boxcars, houses that are falling down, temporary shacks, boats, trucks, and any other such place actually being used as a dwelling.

Thus the first principle in taking the Housing Census is: for every household enumerated on the population schedule, the home must be enumerated on the housing schedule. The second principle in taking the Housing Census is: the vacant dwelling schedule must be used for: one – vacant dwellings for sale or rent; two – vacant dwelling units held for occupancy of absent households; three – dwelling units occupied by nonresident households.

Enumerator: What about the house next door, it's vacant isn't it?

Lady 1: Why nobody's lived there since we've been here. It's been for rent.

Enumerator: Since it is for rent it is a part of the housing market. Therefore, I have to enumerate the house on the vacant dwelling schedule. Here let me run through these questions. Maybe you can give me the answers.

Well that's all the information I need from you, but can you tell me something about the house next door? No one's at home but it looks as though somebody lived there. Are the people away?

Lady 2: Oh yes. The Scotts live there but they're away on a trip, will be gone for two or three months.

Enumerator: I see. Well can you tell me something about the inside of it?

Lady 2: No, but why do you have to include a vacant house like that?

Enumerator: I have to enumerate the house on this vacant dwelling schedule because it is part of the nation's housing accommodations.

Lady 2: I see. Well, ask the people who live just south of it. They can tell you everything you want to know.

Gentleman 1: But I don't see how you can count us in the population here because we are only staying here for a few months. Our real home is in Chicago.

Enumerator: In that case I will enumerate you on this special non-residents schedule and you will be counted as part of the population of Chicago. But in addition I must check a few questions about this house on the vacant dwelling schedule.

Video Transcript

Narrator: The third principle of the housing census is that no enumeration is required for certain special places in which people who have been enumerated on the population schedule are living. These special places include jails, hospitals, school dormitories, and other institutions. They also include hotels, missions, cheap one-night rooming houses, where the people will be enumerated in a special manner on the population schedule on April 8.

The fourth principle in taking the housing census is that no enumeration is required of vacant structures that are no longer useable as living quarters. Vacant structures – with such defects as fallen sides, floors broken down, roofs fallen in – are not considered as part of the nation's supply of housing accommodations.

One of the enumerator's problems will be to tell the difference between two family side-by-side structures and one family attached structures. Two family side-by-side structures are those with a common center wall but with separate family entrances and no other attached buildings on the four sides of the whole structure. Where there are three or more dwelling units side-by-side, with each unit extending from ground to roof, each with a separate entrance, they are enumerated as one family attached structures. A house will also be counted as a one family attached structure when it is joined on one or both sides to a non-residential structure or structures.

This question relates to the need of major repairs. It must be answered on the basis of your observations and need not be asked the respondent. This structure is in need of major repairs. The cracked and broken wall is in danger of falling upon the occupants, a condition making it unsafe for habitation. Major repairs do not mean loose boards or broken railings. This house needs repairing. The yard is littered with trash; the house does not have adequate sewage and garbage facilities. But it is in a safe structural condition and cannot be classified as in need of major repairs. Major repairs are those necessary for continued safe occupancy.

Part four of the occupied dwelling schedule is to be filled out for every renter-occupied, non-farm dwelling unit.

Enumerator: You said you paid 40 dollars a month's rent for your home. Does that include the use of furniture?

Lady 3: No, we have our own furniture.

Enumerator: Do you pay for electricity in addition to the 40 dollars rental?

Lady 3: Yes, we do.

Enumerator: Well what does electricity cost you a month?

Lady 3: Well, last month our bill was two dollars and a half.

Enumerator: Two and a half every month, or is it sometimes higher than that?

Lady 3: Last month it was lower than usual. Sometimes our bill runs up to three dollars and a half, but I think it averages about three dollars a month.

Video Transcript

Enumerator: Do you also pay for gas in addition to rent?

Lady 3: Yes, we have to pay for gas, and I think that runs about two dollars a month all year.

Enumerator: Do you have to furnish your own heat?

Lady 3: Oh yes.

Enumerator: Could you give me some idea of how much your coal costs you a month?

Lady 3: I think that for the whole time we ran the furnace during the year, the coal must have cost us 120 dollars.

Enumerator: That is, over the whole year it costs you about ten dollars a month to heat your house.

Lady 3: That would be a fair figure.

Enumerator: Do you pay for water in addition to rent?

Lady 3: No. The water bills are paid by the landlord. The cost of water is included in the rent.

Narrator: Market value of property is a very important part of the housing census. This question applies only to owner occupied, non-farm units. For owner occupied structures, the market value must be recorded for the entire property, not just the value of the owner's personal unit.

Enumerator: What do you estimate the value of this property to be?

Gentleman 2: I have already given you the value of my dwelling.

Enumerator: Yes, but that was only for the unit you occupy and was required on the population schedule. Now I would like to get the value of both units, the entire property, for the housing schedule.

Gentleman 2: The property is assessed at 12 thousand dollars.

Enumerator: Could you get that for the property if you wanted to sell it now?

Gentleman 2: Assessments in this city are not at full value. I believe I could get about 15 thousand dollars.

Enumerator: So you think 15 thousand dollars covers the value of both dwelling units?

Gentleman 2: Yes, I think 15 thousand dollars would be about right for the entire property.

Narrator: Mortgage debt or land contract is the last section on the housing schedule. These questions must be asked tactfully. Special care is required in obtaining the answer to question 31 because in many cases the holder of the mortgage is not the same as the agency to which payments are made.

Video Transcript

Enumerator: Who holds the first mortgage on your house?

Gentleman 3: The Institution Mortgage Company

Enumerator: Does the Institution Mortgage Company actually hold the mortgage or do you simply make payments there.

Gentleman 3: I'm not sure about that. I believe somebody else actually owns the mortgage and the Institution Mortgage Company merely makes the collections. Yes I remember now. I received a notice from the mortgage company that they had sold the mortgage to somebody else.

Enumerator: Do you remember to whom they sold the mortgage?

Gentleman 3: I'm not sure which one but I know it was a life insurance company.

Narrator: Section by section, the census army of enumerators completes the housing schedules, recording essential facts about the nation's housing, facts that make possible for the first time an important social and economic inventory, the 1940 Census of Housing.