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Kansas Counts is a statewide effort aimed at increasing engagement, awareness, and participation in the 2020 Census.



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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Census Captures Our Present and Helps Us Discover Our Past

The once-a-decade Census is right around the corner formally beginning on April 1, 2020. The census has many benefits for you and your community such as accurate determination of how many representatives each state should have, as well as, congressional district boundaries, basis for distributing more than \$675 billion in federal funds to state and local communities, and informing business and policy decisions.ⁱ These are significant benefits provided by Census data, however there is additional value obtained from information collected, such as genealogical research. That's right, genealogy, the study of tracing our heritage from our ancestors, is aided greatly by the census.

Census data acts as a foundation of initial research for genealogy particularly because the information is easy to read and available in many locations.ⁱⁱ For those looking to connect to their past, the Census is a great starting point for genealogical research as it provides names of ancestors, dates of birth, years of marriage, relationship, and nativity.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, the Census data may lead to village names, post offices, river ways, or townships. Having any of these clues can be helpful if your family line disappeared since people traveled in groups and finding neighbors or others who may have known your family can reveal new information.^{iv}

The information provided by Census data has a wide breadth, as does the accessibility of the records themselves. Microfilm copies can be found at the National Archives, as well as, online through the U.S. Census Collection website (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/usfedcen/>). Furthermore, according to Genealogy.com, field branches of the national archives, Family History Library in Salt Lake City, and other Major Genealogical libraries are fantastic assets to begin a search of the U.S. Census data.

According to Genealogy.com it is important to be aware of the timeframe that you are searching and how the Census was recorded and archived. For example, censuses between 1790 and 1870 are indexed on a statewide basis by head-of-household whereas before 1850 only the head of household was listed and other members were categorized by age group.^v This differs greatly from the 1880-1930 era when the information was indexed using Soundex or Miracode format arranging surnames by similar sound, not spelling.^{vi}

While documented differently, Census data prior to 1850 are still valuable as they provide indicators which can be a great starting point. Some examples of these indicators are when someone becomes the head of household, when someone dies (they disappear from the census records), when someone moves from an area (they disappear from one area and appear in another), who people lived by (identify neighbors), and wealth (what was claimed as property).^{vii} All of these indicators can not only start a search, but also crack a cold case when tracing genealogy, all of these different pieces of information could very well give a dead end search new life.

Some additional tips when searching U.S. Census records include searching for every relative in every census. According to familysearch.org, doing this can reveal unique information about the same person from different census collections.^{viii} This practice can inform changes in a person's life such as the birth of a child, divorce, or death.

Another trick is to look for variations in entries, this can be different spellings of a name, use of a nickname, inconsistency in age, and so on. For those looking into the timeframe when their family immigrated, they may especially notice inaccurate spellings that may have resulted in a complete name change now used in present day.

Finally, it's important to read the entire entry in order to follow a person's journey; you may see job changes, name evolution, relationship development, and migration. All these factors may inform family history you know from stories or reputations you have heard from your family about those coming before you.

The Census provides many important pieces of information that our government, businesses, and communities use in varying ways. This information can also be used by the everyday citizen looking to understand our country demographics or even their own identity. The use of census data for genealogical research is one of the many tools this information provides.

ⁱ <https://www2.census.gov/about/partners/general/fact-sheet-partnerships.pdf?#>

ⁱⁱ https://www.genealogy.com/articles/learn/101_course6.html

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^{iv} https://www.genealogy.com/articles/learn/101_course6.html

^v https://www.genealogy.com/articles/learn/101_course6.html

^{vi} https://www.genealogy.com/articles/learn/101_course6.html

^{vii} https://www.genealogy.com/articles/learn/101_course6.html

^{viii} <https://www.familysearch.org/blog/en/how-to-use-us-census-records/>