

Have You Ever Wondered What Happened to the 1890 Census? – *by Clay Riley*

When tracing our ancestors with U.S. Census Records, there is a gap, a rather substantial one. When locating our great grandparents in the 1889 Census, we would like to locate them in 1890, to see what family members were listed, such as additions or those missing. The 1890 Census listed more than 60 million individuals, but just a few thousand records exist from that census. The time from 1880 to the next recorded census in 1900, some twenty years later, almost skips an entire generation. The censuses of 1790 through 1880 required all or part of schedules to be filed in county clerks' offices. Ironically, this was not required in 1890, and the original (and presumably only) copies of the schedules were forwarded to Washington.

So what happened to the 11th Census of the United States? There is no one explanation, nor is it an easy answer. Here is an abbreviated general answer.

- The first catastrophic event in the loss of the census, was a fire in 1896 at the Department of the Interior storage facility, who administered the Eleventh Census. The fire destroyed a number of special schedules, such as blind, penal institutions, transportation and insurance schedules. The individual general population schedules were not reported as greatly damaged. In fact, a 1903 census clerk found them to be in "fairly good condition."
- In 1903, a Department of the Interior was established and the record storage responsibility was transferred to them, under control of the Census Bureau. On January 21, 1921, a fire broke out in the basement of the Commerce Building where the schedules continued to be stored on shelves. It was reported, after the fire was extinguished, an estimating 25 percent of the 1890 schedules were destroyed, with 50 percent of the remainder damaged by water, smoke, and fire.
- The last piece of the answer was the most disturbing. Over the next few months, rumors spread that salvage attempts would not be made and that Census Director Sam Rogers had recommended that Congress authorize destruction of the 1890 census. The extant record is scanty on storage and possible use of the 1890 schedules between 1922 and 1932 and seemingly silent on what precipitated the following chain of events. In December 1932, in accordance with federal records procedures at the time, the Chief Clerk of the Bureau of Census sent the Librarian of Congress a list of papers no longer necessary for current business and scheduled for destruction. He asked the Librarian to report back to him any documents that should be retained for their historical interest. The Librarian identified no records as permanent, the list was sent forward, and Congress authorized destruction on February 21, 1933. Item 22 on the list for Bureau of the Census read "Schedules, Population . . . 1890, Original."

.Note: Approximate 520 records of individuals in Texas survived the 1890 Census fire. They were from Ellis, Hood, Kaufman, Rusk and Trinity counties. The majority of these are from Ellis County.

Additional information as to the fate of the 1890 Census can be found;

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1996/spring/1890-census-1.html>

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1996/spring/1890-census-2.html>

US 1890 Census Population Schedules

C44

FAMILY SCHEDULE—1 TO 10 PERSONS.

[7-556 a.] Eleventh Census of the United States.

Supervisor's District No. 3 }
 Enumeration District No. 78 }
SCHEDULE No. 1.
POPULATION AND SOCIAL STATISTICS.

Name of city, town, township, precinct, district, lot, or other minor civil division. Permyville Prec No 11; County: Perry; State: Alabama;
 Street and No.: X; Ward: X; Name of Institution: X
 Enumerated by me on the 4th day of June, 1890. L. Key Davis Enumerator.

A.—Number of Dwelling-house in the order of visitation.	B.—Number of families in this dwelling-house.	C.—Number of persons in this dwelling-house.	D.—Number of Family in the order of visitation.	E.—No. of Persons in this family.
44	1	8	44	8
INQUIRIES.				
1	2	3	4	5
Christian name in full, and initial of middle name.	William W	Eliza A	Charles A	Young E
Surname.	Smith	Smith	Smith	Smith
Whether a soldier, sailor, or marine during the civil war (U. S. R. or Conl.), or widow of such person.	Conf Sol	+	+	+
Relationship to head of family.	Head	Wife	Son	Son
Whether white, black, mulatto, quadroon, octoroon, Chinese, Japanese, or Indian.	White	White	White	White
Sex.	Male	Female	Male	Male
Age at nearest birthday, if under one year, give age in months.	55	24	23	21
Whether single, married, widowed, or divorced.	Married	Married	Single	Single
Whether married during the census year (June 1, 1890, to May 31, 1890).	Do	Do	+	+
Mother of how many children, and number of those children living.	+	14-2 D.	+	+
Place of birth.	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama	Alabama
Place of birth of Father.	South Carolina	Georgia	Alabama	Alabama
Place of birth of Mother.	South Carolina	Tennessee	Alabama	Alabama
Number of years in the United States.	+	+	+	+
Whether naturalized.	+	+	+	+
Whether naturalization papers have been taken out.	+	+	+	+
Profession, trade, or occupation.	Farmer	Homemaker	Farmer	Farmer
Months unemployed during the census year (June 1, 1890, to May 31, 1890).	0	0	0	0
Attendance at school (in months) during the census year (June 1, 1890, to May 31, 1890).	+	+	+	6 Months
Able to Read.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Able to Write.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Able to speak English. If not, the language or dialect spoken.	English	English	English	English
Whether suffering from acute or chronic disease, with name of disease and length of it as afflicted.	No	No	No	No
Whether defective in mind, sight, hearing, or speech, or whether crippled, maimed, or deformed, with name of defect.	No	No	No	No
Whether a prisoner, convict, homeless child, or pauper.	No	No	No	No
Supplemental schedule and page.				

TO ENUMERATORS.—See inquiries numbered 26 to 30, inclusive, on the second page of this schedule. These inquiries must be made concerning each family and each farm visited.

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