



Census Records before 1850 Really Can Speak

by Terry Moore, CG

On Wednesday evenings I volunteer at the Raleigh Family History Center assisting patrons with their family history research. One question I usually ask is if every census has been searched during their ancestor’s lifetime, especially for those who died before the 1850 census when the names and ages of each member of the household were first recorded. A few patrons answer yes, but most assure me that the 1790–1840 census records don’t tell you anything.

But those early census records can speak to us. Most importantly they reveal where a family lived and what the household looked like through the sex and age range of the members. It is true that we don’t know the names of every individual, but the 1820 through 1840 censuses have nuggets of information. In 1820 we learn if the head of household was of foreign birth and not naturalized, and how many in the household were involved in agriculture, commerce, or manufacturing. In 1830 we learn if anyone in the household was deaf, dumb, blind, or alien. In 1840, there is so much more, like

how many in the household were involved in mining, agriculture, commerce, manufacturing and trade, navigation on oceans or rivers, or if one were a learned professor or engineer; whether someone was deaf, dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, over twenty years old and illiterate; and whether one was naturalized or not. And did I forget the 1840 census also included the name and age of Revolutionary War pensioners. Whether the answers are positive or negative they tell a story about the family.

Each census also provides information about slaves and free people of color. Only the number of slaves is given in the 1790 through 1810 censuses, but the 1820 census provides more details, such as sex and age range. The 1830 and 1840 censuses provide even more details.

By using the 1790 through 1830 census information, the birth year of the head of household can be narrowed nicely. As an example, John Avery died in 1832 and the 1830 census gave his age as between 60 and 69 years. He was listed in the following census records.

1790	1 free white male	16 years and older	[born 1774 or before]
1800	1 free white male	26 to 44 years old	[born 1756-1774]

Comparing these two censuses narrows the birth year.

1810	1 free white male	45 years or older	[born 1765 or earlier]
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We now know that John was born between 1756 and 1765.

1820	1 free white male	45 years or older	[born 1775 or earlier]
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This census does not help narrow John’s birth year.

1830	1 free white male	60-69 years old	[born 1761-1770]
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It now becomes clear that John Avery was born between 1761 and 1765, which might help us differentiate between two men of the same name and of similar ages.

Calculating the birth years from age ranges can be used for each family member, even though their names are not known. Because I don’t like to calculate birth years each time I use the early census records, the following charts help me easily determine when someone in a certain age bracket was born. Hopefully the charts will prove useful to you and encourage you to converse with the 1790 through 1840 census records.

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1790 census

Free white males

Age in years	16 & up	0-16	all ages	All other free persons	Slaves
Born	1774 or before	1775-1790	1790 or before		

Free white females

1800 census

Free white males

Age in years	0 - 9	10 -15	16 -25	26-44	45 & over	0 - 9	10 -15	16 -25	26-44	45 & over	All other free persons	Slaves
Born	1791-1800	1785-1790	1775-1784	1756-1774	1755 or before	1791-1800	1785-1790	1775-1784	1756-1774	1755 or before		

Free white females

1810 census

Free white males

Age in years	0 -9	10 -15	16 -25	26-44	45 & over	0 - 9	10 -15	16 -25	26-44	45 & over	All other free persons, except Indians not taxed	Slaves
Born	1801-1810	1795-1800	1785-1794	1766-1784	1765 or before	1801-1810	1795-1800	1785-1794	1766-1784	1765 or before		

Free white females

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1820 census

Free white males Free white females

Age in years	1811-1820	0-9	1805-1810	16-17	1795-1804	16-25	1776-1794	26-44	1775 or 45 & over before	1811-1820	0-9	1805-1810	10-15	1795-1804	16 - 25	1776-1794	26-44	1775 or 45 & over bef	Foreign not Naturalized	No. of persons in agriculture	No. of persons in commerce	No. of persons in manufacturing
Born																						

Male slaves Female slaves Free Colored Males Free Colored Females

Age in years	1807-1820	0-13	1795-1806	14-25	1776-1794	26-44	1775 or 45 & over bef	1807-1820	0-13	1795-1806	14-25	1776-1794	26-44	1775 or 45 & over bef	1807-1820	0-13	1795-1806	14-25	1776-1794	26-44	1775 or 45 & over bef	All other free persons, except Indians not taxed
Born																						

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1840

Free White Males

Age in years	0-4	1836-1840	1831-1835	10-14	1826-1830	15-19	1821-1825	20-29	1811-1820	30-39	1801-1810	40-49	1791-1800	50-59	1781-1790	60-69	1771-1780	70-79	1761-1770	80-89	1751-1760	90-99	1741-1750	1731 or bef	100 & up
Born	0-4	1836-1840	1831-1835	10-14	1826-1830	15-19	1821-1825	20-29	1811-1820	30-39	1801-1810	40-49	1791-1800	50-59	1781-1790	60-69	1771-1780	70-79	1761-1770	80-89	1751-1760	90-99	1741-1750	1731 or bef	100 & up

Free white females

Age in years	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up
Born	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up

Free Colored Males

Age in years	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up
Born	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up

Free Colored Females

Age in years	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up
Born	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up

Male Slaves

Age in years	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up
Born	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up

Female Slaves

Age in years	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up
Born	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up

Total. No. of Persons Employed in

Age in years	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up
Born	0-9	1831-1840	1817-1830	24-35	1805-1816	36-54	1786-1804	55-99	1741-1785	1740 or bef	100 & up

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Name & Age
of Rev War
Pensioners

White Persons
Deaf & Dumb

Slaves & Colored

Schools

	Born	Age in years	1827-1840	1816-1826	1815 or 25 & up	Blind	Idiotic or insane	Born 1819 Illiterate males over 21	Not Naturalized	Deaf & Dumb	Blind	Idiotic or insane	Universities or colleges	No. of scholars	Academies or grammar schools	No. of scholars	Primary & Common schools	No. of scholars	No. of scholars in public charge	No. of white persons over 20 years, in each family, who are illiterate