

New York State Census Records

By Marian S. Henry

The census is one of the first tools a beginning genealogist is introduced to and remains a workhorse for experienced genealogists. Using census information is a basic skill for genealogists. The experienced genealogist searches all relevant census records, including state census records, recognizing that an aging parent or a child who died young may be recorded on only one census. Families moving into upper New York State in the early nineteenth century were often transient, passing through the state rapidly on a genealogical time scale. In this situation it is doubly important to check all possible censuses. There is a gap in the federal census record due to the loss of the 1890 census. The 1892 New York State census can help to fill that gap for your New York State ancestors. In this article I discuss what state census records were created, how to get to these records, and what information can be gained from each state census.

What Records Were Created

Census enumerations for New York State occurred every ten years from 1825 to 1875 and from 1905 to 1925. There is more information in the nineteenth-century records than one usually expects from a census. In addition to an enumeration of the population, the state was interested in information about farms and businesses, about churches and newspapers, about marriages and deaths. If your ancestor lived in the state during this time and owned land, even a few acres, or a small business such as a gristmill or a cabinet making shop, then you may find how many acres he planted in buckwheat and how many sheep he owned, or how many people he employed and how much he paid them.

Only one census was taken between 1875 and 1905 – that of 1892. This census, dated February 16, 1892, was quite brief. It asked only name, sex, age, color, in what country born, citizen or alien, and occupation. This census gains in importance because of the loss in 1921 of the 1890 federal census.

The nineteenth century was a time of flux for the state. As settlers flooded in, new counties were established to provide local government. Thus your ancestor's location may change from one census to the next, not because he moved, but because a new county was formed. The following link is to a table of upstate counties formed after the Revolutionary War. It lists the year the county was formed, the parent county/counties, and the first census in which the county is listed as a separate entity. The last column lists that part of the state census records which are incomplete or missing in the New York State Library in Albany.

Table 1 - Upstate NY Counties Formed After the Revolutionary War

How to Access the Records

Original state census records were stored by county in each county clerk's office. Copies of these records were sent to Albany and are today held by the state library there. Public libraries with a local history or genealogy section frequently have microfilm copies for their county, and occasionally for neighboring counties. You should inquire about interlibrary loan of these microfilms. All of these collections are probably incomplete; earliest records will be hardest to find.

I searched the catalog of the Family History Library for 1825 New York census records and found only Washington and Cattaraugus counties. For the 1835 census only Cattaraugus County is listed. The NEHGS library catalog lists indices to the 1855 census of Schenectady and Montgomery counties, but nothing earlier. I found no New York State census records in the databases in *Ancestry.com*. County web pages sometimes have census information. Schuyler County, for example, was formed in 1854. Nevertheless, the website offers 1825 census data for those parts of the county, which, at the time, were in neighboring counties. Ontario, one of the oldest upstate counties, offers indices for 1850-1875 records online at the web page for the county archive. The archive holds records county records from 1845 to 1925. County historical societies may be another source of online information.

The remainder of this article details the wealth of information to be found in these records. After listing the questions asked on the various censuses, I present some examples to show how the state census can enhance the family

information obtained from the federal census records. The most complete record in the state library is for Steuben County, so I chose that county for my examples. The original census records are held in the county clerk's office in Bath. The collection is not complete. Only a few towns are present for 1825, and 1845 is missing entirely. For my examples I have chosen the family of David McMaster, a farmer from Bath. In addition to David, (born 1796), the household contained his wife, Mary, (born 1815), her mother, Abby Humphries, (born 1782), and at least nine children born between 1829 and 1859. [1]

Questions for 1825 and 1835 State Census

Information from the 1825 census is contained in thirty-six columns. Columns 1 to 13 do the basic job of a census – they count people. Columns 14 to 16 ask about marriage, birth, and death. Columns 17 to 21 are concerned with agriculture, and columns 22 to 36 with “domestic manufacturies.” The 1835 census was slightly shorter.

Table II - Questions for the 1825 and 1835 New York State Census

1855 Census Questions

The 1855 census is enormous. Like the 1850 federal census before it, this is the first state census to list by name every member of the household. Unlike the federal census, it also specifies the relationship of each person to the head of household. This census also asks how many years present in this city or town, which can help you track your family's movements within the state.

The census information requires more than 150 columns. The population schedule occupies columns 1-21. The agriculture section of the second schedule is the largest section of the census, columns 22-101. This section is completed with questions about Domestic Manufacturies, columns 102-108. Industry other than agriculture is in schedule III, columns 109-125. Schedule IV contains listings of marriages and deaths, columns 126-139. Schedule V lists churches and schools. Schedule VI lists newspapers and other periodicals. The questions in columns 1-139 are listed below by schedule.

Table III - Questions for the 1855 New York State Census

1865 and 1875

The 1865 census contains some military service information. An added schedule lists the page and line of a person in the census and adds information such as their rank and the unit they are serving with. In the 1875 census the schedules appear in a different order, marriages and deaths coming before the agriculture and manufacturing sections. There is more detail in several entries. The section on sheep, columns 141-148, is shown below as an example.

141 Shorn in 1874

142 Shorn in 1875

143 Lambs raised in 1874

144 Lambs raised in 1875

145 Pounds of wool shorn in 1874

146 Pounds of wool shorn in 1875

147 Sheep slaughtered in 1874

148 Sheep killed by dogs in 1874

Questions for 1905, 1915, and 1925 Census

Permanent Residence	1	Street	house number
Name	2	Name of each person whose usual place of abode on June 1 was in this family	
Relation	3	relationship of each person to the head of the family	

Color, Sex and Age	4	color or race	5	sex	6	age at last birthday
Nativity	7	If of foreign birth write name of the country				
Citizenship	8	Number of years in the united States	9	Citizen or alien	10	If naturalized when and where
Occupation	11	Trade or profession	12	class [wages or not]		
Inmates of Institutions, Infants under one year of age	13	residence when admitted				

Example: David McMaster, Farmer

In the 1850 federal census we find David McMaster living in Bath with his wife Mary, six (presumed) children, an older woman named Abby Humphries, and two other people who may be servants. The gap in ages of children, David M., age 20, and Adaline, age 6, suggests the possibility of several married daughters or children who died young. The 1855 state census identifies Abby Humphries as Mary's mother, born in Connecticut. It also gives the county of birth for those born in New York State, and states how long they have lived in Bath. One son, Greg H. McMaster, is no longer in the household. [2] A daughter, Adaline McMaster, is no longer listed in the household. She would have been 11 years old, and so probably died rather than married. A son, James, has been added. Elizabeth Cummins, probably supplying domestic help in 1850 has gone, her place taken by Mary Heron.

	Entry in 1850 Federal Census dwelling #300, family #314, Bath, Steuben Co.	Entry in 1855 NY State Census dwelling #122, family #133 2nd dist. Bath, Steuben Co.
Dwelling		frame house, \$2000
David McMaster	46, M, County Judge, \$5000, b. NY	51 M, b. Otsego, native, mar., 28 yrs in Bath, farmer, native voter, owner of land
Mary McMaster	35, F, b. NY	41, wife, b. Chemung, married, 34 yrs. in Bath
Greg H. McMaster	21, M, Lawyer, b. NY	[not listed in household]
David M. McMaster	20, M, Engineer, b. NY	24 M, son, b. Steuben, 24 yrs. in Bath, engineer, native voter
Adaline McMaster	6, F, b. NY, attended school	[not listed in household]
Mary McMaster	3, F, b. NY	9 F, daughter, Steuben, 9 yrs. in Bath
Clara McMaster	2, F, b. NY	7 F, daughter, Steuben, 7 yrs. in Bath
Edward McMaster (1850)	6/12, b. NY	5 M, son, b. Steuben, 5 yrs. in Bath
George E. McMaster (1855)		
James S. McMaster		3 M, son, b. Steuben, 3 yrs. in Bath
Abby Humphreys	68, F, b. Conn.	71, F, wife mother, b. Conn. , wid., 30 yrs. in Bath, owner of land

Elizabeth Cummins	16, F, b. NY, attended school	[not listed in household]
Leander Thomas	15, M, black, b. NY, attended school.	19 M, black, servant, b. Steuben, 19 yrs. in Bath, colored not taxed
Mary A. Heron		17, F, servant, b. Steuben, 17 yrs in Bath

In addition to the population schedule, David McMaster is listed in the agriculture schedule since he owns land. This schedule gives the following description of his farm with milk cows, pigs, apple orchard, and bee hives. David McMaster, 92 acres improved, 2 acres unimproved, cash value of farm \$5400, of stock \$410, of tools and implements \$130, 34 acres plowed previous year, none fallow, 24 acres in pasture, 14 acres of meadow, 15 tons of hay, no grass seed, no spring wheat, 20 acres sown to winter wheat yielding 236 bushels, 5 acres sown to oats yielding 60 bushels, no rye, 12 acres sown to barley yielding 300 bushels, 6 acres sown to buckwheat yielding 50 bushels, 10 acres sown to corn yielding 15 bushels, 1 acre sown to potatoes yielding 50 bushels, no peas, beans, turnips, flax, hemp, hops, or tobacco, 40 bushels of apples, no maple sugar, molasses, or wine, 100 pounds of honey, no wax or silk, 4 cattle over one year, no working oxen, 8 cows, 1 killed for beef, 8 cows milked yielding 1200 pounds of butter, 2 horses, no mules, 5 swine over 6 months, 15 sheep, 18 fleeces, 54 pounds of wool, no poultry sold, \$60 value of eggs sold. I'm not sure how to get 18 fleeces off of 15 sheep; perhaps three of 18 original sheep were later slaughtered.

Although David's mother-in-law, Abby Humphries, is listed as an owner of land, I found no listing for her in agricultural schedules for any of the four districts of Bath. Perhaps she owned the farm jointly with her son-in-law. Or perhaps her land was managed by someone else and was listed under that name. The answer may lie in land records.

The first census in which the David McMaster household appears is the 1830 federal census. [3] From information in the 1850 and 1855 censuses about how long people were resident in Bath, we expect this 1830 household to contain David McMaster, 26, his wife Mary McMaster, 16, her mother Abby Humphries, 48, and their eldest son Greg McMaster, 1. What we find is 1M<5, 1M 30-40, 1F 20-30, 1F 40-50. The agreement is moderately successful.

The first state census listing the David McMaster household is 1835. This census describes the household as containing 3 males total, 3 females total, 1 male 18-45, 1 male voter, 1 married female under 45, no females 16-45, 1 female unmarried under 16, no marriages, 2 births one male and one female, 2 deaths one male and one female, 50 acres of improved land, 6 neat cattle, no horses, no sheep, 11 hogs.

We can account for the three males as the head of household and his two young sons. The three females we assign to Mary, her mother, and possibly a daughter, unmarried, under 16. The two births and deaths listed occurred during 1835 and may indicate babies, perhaps twins, who died young. We can also see that the farm is smaller – 50 acres of improved land instead of the 92 in 1855.

Even the somewhat skimpy information of the 1892 census can be useful. In this census I find three of the McMaster daughters, apparently unmarried, listed sequentially in Bath. [4]

Name	Sex	Age	What Country Born	Citizen or Alien	Occupation
Mary McMaster	F	46	US	C	teacher
Clara McMaster	F	43	US	C	
Juliet McMaster	F	33	US	C	Stenographer

Postscript

There is also more general information included in some state censuses that may not be found elsewhere.

In 1855 farm hands hired by the season or year earned \$20 per month. Those hired for haying and harvest earned \$1.50 per day. Women hired for household work \$0.75 per day or \$2 per week. [5] Wages in 1875 per month: blacksmith, \$39; tailor, \$35; cooper, \$28; baker, \$30; brick maker, \$25; wagon maker, \$25.

Farmers were apparently troubled by dogs attacking sheep flocks. Whether perceived or real, the matter merited a question in the 1875 census. In the 4th district of Bath I find that 8 sheep were reported killed by dogs; in comparison 45 sheep were slaughtered that year. Other data in the 2nd district are less easy to analyze. One farmer reported none of his 28 sheep killed by dogs, but he also slaughtered all 28. Apparently he was shifting to pig farming. Another farmer reported having no sheep, but 14 were killed by dogs. Is that why he had no sheep? Or did he sell or slaughter the rest?

[1] This information was obtained from 1850, 1855, and 1870 census records.

[2] He is not listed on his own in 1855, but there is a G. H. McMaster listed for Bath in the 1860 federal census.

[3] Bath, Steuben Co., p. 294.

[4] Fourth district of Bath, Steuben Co., page 003.

[5] This difference between daily and weekly wage makes more sense if the weekly wage includes room and board.

Table 1 - Upstate NY Counties Formed After the Revolutionary War

County	Year Formed	Parent County/Counties	First Census	NY State Library missing/incomplete
Allegany	1806	Genesee	1810	1825-1845
Broome	1806	Tioga	1810	1825, 1845
Cattaraugus	1808	Genesee	1810	
Cayuga	1799	Onondaga	1800	1825-1845, 1905
Chautauqua	1808	Genesee	1810	
Chemung	1798	Tioga	1800	1825-1845, 1875
Chenango	1798	Herkimer, Tioga	1800	1825-1845, 1892
Clinton	1788	Washington	1790	1825-1875
Cortland	1808	Onondaga	1810	1845
Delaware	1797	Ulster, Otsego	1800	1825-1845
Erie	1821	Niagara	1825	1825-1845, 1875-1892
Essex	1799	Clinton	1800	1825-1845
Franklin	1808	Clinton	1810	1825-1865, 1892
Fulton	1838	Montgomery	1840	1825-1835, 1892
Genesee	1802	Ontario	1810	1825-1865
Hamilton	1816	Montgomery	1820	1825-1875
Herkimer	1791	Montgomery	1800	1825
Jefferson	1805	Oneida	1810	1825-1865, 1892
Lewis	1805	Oneida	1810	1845
Livingston	1821	Genesee, Ontario	1825	1825-1845, 1892-1905

Madison	1806	Chenango	1810	1825-1845
Monroe	1821	Genesee, Ontario	1825	1825-1845
Niagara	1808	Genesee	1810	1825-1845, 1892
Oneida	1798	Herkimer	1800	1825-1905
Onondaga	1794	Herkimer	1800	1825-1845
Ontario	1789	Montgomery	1790	1825-1845, 1905
Orleans	1824	Genesee	1825	1825-1845
Oswego	1816	Oneida, Onondaga	1820	1825-1845, 1905
Otsego	1791	Montgomery	1800	1835-1845
Saratoga	1791	Albany	1800	1825-1845
Schenectady	1809	Albany	1810	1825
Schoharie	1795	Albany, Otsego	1800	1845
Schuyler	1854	Tompkins, Steuben, Chemung	1855	1825-1845, 1892- 1905
Seneca	1804	Cayuga	1810	1825-1905
St. Lawrence	1802	Clinton, Herkimer, Montgomery	1810	1845, 1865-1892
Steuben	1796	Ontario	1800	none
Tioga	1791	Montgomery	1800	1845
Tompkins	1817	Cayuga, Seneca	1820	1845-1855
Warren	1813	Washington	1820	1825-1855
Wayne	1823	Ontario, Seneca	1825	1825-1875
Wyoming	1841	Genesee	1845	1825-1865, 1892- 1905
Yates	1823	Ontario, Steuben	1825	1905

Table II - Questions for the 1825 and 1835 New York State Census

1	The name of the head of each family
2	The number of male persons in the family, (the name of whose head is in the first column) including its head, if male.
3	The number of female persons in the same family, including its head, if female.
4	The number of male persons in the same family subject to militia duty. [i.e. age 18-45]
5	The whole number of male persons in the same family entitled by the constitution of this state to vote for all offices elective by the people.
6	The number of male persons in the same family who are aliens not naturalized.
7	The number of persons in the same family who are paupers.
8	The number of persons in the same family who are persons of color not taxed
9	The number of persons of color in the same family who are taxed

10	The whole number of persons of color in the same family who are colored, taxed, and entitled by the constitution of this state to vote for all officers elective by the people (and not to be included in the ninth column)
11	The number of married female persons in the same family under the age of 45 years
12	The number of unmarried female persons in the same family between the ages of 16 and 45 years
13	The number of female persons in the same family, unmarried, under the age of 16 years
14	The number of marriages occurring in the same family, where the female married resided, during the year preceding
15	Whole number of births in the same family during the year preceding
16	Whole number of deaths in the same family during the year preceding
17	The number of acres of improved land occupied by the same family
18	The number of neat cattle owned by the same family
19	The number of horses owned by the same family
20	The number of sheep owned by the same family
21	The number of hogs owned by the same family
22	The number of yards of fulled cloth manufactured in the domestic way in the same family, during the preceding year
23	The number of yards of flannel and other woollen cloths not fulled, manufactured in the domestic way in the same family, during the year preceding
24	The number of yards of linen, cotton, or other thin cloths, manufactured in the domestic way in the same family, during the year preceding
25*	Deaf and dumb, blind, idiots and lunatics [separated by age and "circumstances"]
25**	Whole number of Grist Mills owned by same family
26**	Whole number of Saw Mills owned by same family
27**	Whole number of Oil Mills owned by same family
28**	Whole number of Fulling Mills owned by same family
29**	Whole number of Carding machines owned by same family
30**	Whole number of Cotton Factories owned by same family
31**	Whole number of Woollen Factories owned by same family
32**	Whole number of Cotton and Woollen Factories owned by same family
33**	Whole number of Iron works owned by same family
34**	Whole number of Trip Hammers owned by same family
35**	Whole number of Distilleries owned by same family
36**	Whole number of Asheries owned by same family.

* Final question on 1835 census. ** These questions dropped on 1835 census.

Table III - Questions for the 1855 New York State Census

I. Population Schedule (columns 1-21)

1	Dwellings numbered in the order of visitation
2	Of what material built
3	Value
4	Families numbered in the order of their visitation
5	Name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June was in this family
6	Age
7	Sex
8	Color {whether black or mulatto}
9	Relation to the head of the family
10	In what county of this State or in what other State or Foreign Country born
11	Married
12	Widowed
13	Years resident in this city or town
14	Profession, trade, or occupation
15	Native voters
16	Naturalized voters
17	Aliens
18	Persons of color not taxed
19	Persons over 21 years who cannot read and write
20	Owners of land
21	Deaf, Dumb, Blind, Insane, or Idiotic

II. Agriculture (columns 22-101) and Domestic Manufacturies (columns 102-108)

	22	Name of the owner, agent, or manager of farm			
Acres	23	Improved	24	Unimproved	
Cash value	25	of Farm	26	of Stock	27 of Tools and Implements
Acres	28	plowed the year previous	29	in fallow the year previous	30 in pasture the year previous
Meadow	31	Acres	32	Tons of Hay	33 Bushels of grass seed
Spring wheat	34	Acres	35	Bushels harvested	
Winter Wheat	36	Acres sown	37	Bushels harvested	
Oats	38	Acres sown	39	Bushels harvested	

Rye	40	Acres sown	41	Bushels harvested		
Barley	42	Acres sown	43	Bushels harvested		
Buckwheat	44	Acres sown	45	Bushels harvested		
Corn	46	Acres sown	47	Bushels harvested		
Potatoes	48	Acres sown	49	Bushels harvested		
Peas	50	Acres sown	51	Bushels harvested		
Beans	52	Acres sown	53	Bushels harvested		
Turnips	54	Acres sown	55	Bushels harvested		
Flax	56	Acres sown	57	Tons of Lint	58	Bushels of Seed
Hemp	59	Acres sown	60	Tons of Hemp		
Hops	61	Acres planted	62	Pounds harvested		
Tobacco	63	Acres planted	64	Pounds harvested		
Apple orchards	65	Bushels of Apples	66	Barrels of Cider		
Market Gardens	67	Acres cultivated	68	Value of Products sold		
	69	Pounds of maple sugar made				
	70	Gallons of Maple Molasses made				
	71	Gallons of wine made				
	72	Pounds of honey collected				
	73	Pounds of wax collected				
	74	Silk Pounds of cocoons				
Unenumerated articles of farm produce	75	Kinds	76	Quantity	77	Value
Neat Cattle	78	Under one year old	79	Over one year, exclusive of working oxen and cows	80	Working oxen
	81	Cows	82	Number of cattle killed for beef	83	Whole number of cows milked
Butter	84	Number of cows	85	Pounds of butter		
Cheese	86	Number of cows	87	Pounds of cheese		
Cows milked for market	88	Number of cows	89	Gallons of milk sold		
	90	Horses				
	91	Mules				
Swine	92	under 6 months	93	over 6 months		
Sheep	94	Number of sheep	95	Number of fleeces	96	Pounds of wool
Poultry	97	Value of Poultry sold	98	Value of Eggs sold		
Special Manures Used	99	Kinds	100	Quantity	101	Value
Domestic Manufactures	102	Yards of Fulled	103	Yards of Flannel made		

		Cloth made			
	104	Yards of Linen made	105	Yards of Cotton and Mixed Cloths	
Other articles of Domestic Manufactures	106	Kinds	107	Quantity	108 Valu

III Industry other than Agriculture (Columns 109-125)

	109	Name of Person or Company owning the Shop, Factory, Mine, Quarry, or other object of industry			
	110	Name of Business or Manufacture			
Capital Invested	111	in Real Estate	112	in Tools and Machinery	
Raw Materials	113	Quantity	114	Kind	115 Value
Annual Product	116	Quantity	117	Kind	118 Value
	119	Kind of Motive Power			
Persons Employed		Adults	120	Men	121 Women
		Children under 18 years	122	Boys	123 Girls
Wages exclusive of board		Average monthly wages	124	of men	125 of women

IV Marriages and Deaths (columns 126-139)

Marriages	Ages	126	of husband	127	of wife
Previous civil condition		128	of husband	129	of wife
		130	in what month married	131	Place of marriage, where different from present residence
Deaths		132	Age	133	Sex
		134	Color	135	Civil condition
		136	Time of death	137	Native Country
		138	Trade or occupation	139	Disease or Cause of Death