Coping with No Database for the 1940 Census: Using Finding Aids and Enumeration Districts

By Juvanne Martin, CG

Have you ever typed anything into a database and got no results from a search engine? Well, imagine your surprise when the National Archives and Records Administration digitally release the long awaited 1940 census on April 2, 2012, and there is no search engine, no database?

I am not sure what the reaction will be. But many citizens have been feeling the hype from the press for months now. Many newspapers and televisions across the United States have simply ignored the message. Having no search engine (database) in a federal census is not news. It does not sell newspapers or lead to a broader audience on national television to heighten the Nielsen ratings. It is not a priority.

However, for the many historians and genealogists across the United States, it is a huge concern. How do you locate someone in 1940 when there is no index?

In an effort to correct this problem, FamilySearch.org, findmypast.com, and Archives have partnered together in a combined, national effort to encourage community groups and organizations across America to create an index and are asking for volunteers.

The Idaho Genealogical Society has been asked by FamilySearch.org to help in this historical endeavor. We are recruiting indexing volunteers all over Idaho to index the Idaho portion of the federal 1940 census. If you would like to volunteer to Index, please contact us at idahogenealogy@hotmail.com.

By indexing you are helping create the database for the 1940 census. It’s as simple as downloading the indexing software onto a computer and typing what you see on the screen. You are basically doing data entry. The best news is that you can do everything from home and don’t even have to leave your house!

Letter from the National Archives and Records Administration:

Dear Ms. Martin:

Connie Potter forwarded your email to me. I’ve answered your questions in bold. If we can provide additional information, please let us know.

1. How many pages are in the US 1940 Census for the State of Idaho? There are 17,544 pages for Idaho.
2. How long has NARA been working to digitize the images? NARA began digitizing the images in late 2009 and completed the digitization in about 18 months.
3. Why did you decide to go digital and not use microfilm anymore? NARA has created digital images of the 1940 Census schedules and maps to make the 1940 census available in a more modern and efficient format for researcher access.
4. Can state archives still purchase the 1940 census on microfilm for their collection? Yes, microfilm orders can be placed with the National Archives Trust Fund beginning on April 2nd. More information is available at [http://estore.archives.gov/Category/105_1/1940_Census.aspx](http://estore.archives.gov/Category/105_1/1940_Census.aspx)
5. How long will you have the 1940 census on your site before Archives.com and Ancestry.com get the census on their sites? We cannot address the plans of other organizations.
6. How long does NARA expect for the entire United States to have a searchable database (index) up and running? Family Search can best answer this question.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Warlow
National Archives and Records Administration
Open Government Division, Information Services

Finding Aids for converting addresses into Enumeration Districts

Without a search engine or database to find someone, what do you do?

- First, you need to know the exact street or rural address of where the person resided in 1940. Polk City Directories can be located in most libraries or repositories. Many times even though a city/town wasn’t big enough to be called “urban”, surrounding areas and counties are listed in the back of a directory. Other avenues to check are telephone books, tax or deed records, military draft papers from WWII, a military discharge from WWII, a social security application, school and employment records, naturalization records or declarations of intent.

At the Idaho State Archives and Research Library located in Boise, Idaho, I found the city of Burley in the back of the Twin Falls Polk City Directory, 1939-40 and located the following entry on page 228:

MARTIN, Abe H. (Mary E.) barber h420 N Yale av

- Second, using the information you located, you will need to find the enumeration district in the state of residence. Steve Morse, PhD, Joel D. Weintraub, PhD, David R. Kehs, PhD, and a ton of volunteers created databases for locating enumeration districts in the 1940 census:
  http://stevemorse.org/census/

If you know someone did not move from 1930 to 1940, you can use the 1930/1940 ED Converter utility:

http://stevemorse.org/census/ed2040.php?year=1940. However, if you either don’t know the enumeration district in 1930 or don’t have the 1930 census handy, you can also check:


- Third, you may want to consult an enumeration district map:
  http://stevemorse.org/census/xml1940edmaps.html

My husband’s grandparents, Abraham (Abe) Holmes and Mary Boles Martin, lived at 420 N. Yale Ave. in Burley, Idaho in 1940. By entering Idaho, Cassia County, and then Burley on the ED map database, I was able to find a 1940 map of Burley, Idaho that was divided into three sections. The second section yielded results. I found Yale Ave. located in the Southgate Addition Enumeration District [ED] 16-7.

The Unified 1940 Census ED Finder allows you to select a State, County, City or Town, House Number or Street Address and also has a database for 1930 if you know the state and enumeration district [ED].

http://stevemorse.org/census/unified.html. It is basically your one stop shop for two databases in one step.
Idaho Statistics for 1940

In 1940 there were 524,873 people living in Idaho compared to 445,032 in 1930: a 17.9% increase. The capital city of Boise had a population of 26,130. Only six other towns, Coeur’d Alene, Idaho Falls, Lewiston, Nampa, Pocatello, and Twin Falls, had more than 10,000 residents residing in their cities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coeur d’ Alene</td>
<td>10,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho Falls</td>
<td>15,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>10,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nampa</td>
<td>12,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocatello</td>
<td>18,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twin Falls</td>
<td>11,851</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be considered urban, a town would have to have a population of 2,500 or more. The remainder of the population was classified as rural. Depending upon the census year, some places rose or fell from rural to urban status or urban to rural. For instance, Alameda, which is now a part of Pocatello in Bannock County, was classified as urban for the first time.

Based upon Table 3: Area and Population of Counties, Urban and Rural: 1920 to 1940 on page 278 of Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940; United States Dept. of Commerce, US Government Printing Office, Washington, 1942, I have shortened the information to include just each county and their population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ada</td>
<td>50,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>3,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bannock</td>
<td>34,759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear Lake</td>
<td>7,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benewah</td>
<td>7,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bingham</td>
<td>21,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaine</td>
<td>5,295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boise</td>
<td>2,333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Census within a Census

Each decade enumerators are faced with new questions to ask the general public. In 1930, it was: “Do you own a radio?” In 1940, it was: “In what place were you living on April 1, 1935?” By asking this question, enumerators were creating a census within a census.
The Great Depression of the 1930s caused many people to travel around seeking employment, not only from town to town, but state to state. With the creation of many government programs such as the 
\textbf{CCC} (Civilian Conservation Corps) or \textbf{WPA} (Works Project Administration), many Americans traveled from job to job to build public buildings, bridges and roads or work in forests planting trees, parks, or upgrading state parks.

Other interesting trivia: Education was broken down by grade level, graduating from high school, and college. From 1930-1940 many teenagers were dropping out of high school to enter the workplace or the military. Employment information was gathered for those as young as 14.

Military: You won’t find Civil War listed here. The majority of Civil War Veterans had already died by this time. Instead, War World I, the Spanish-American War or Boxer Rebellion, World War Regular Establishment or Peace Time Service was listed.

More information and questions on the 1940 census can be found:

http://www.archives.gov/research/census/1940/index.html