

Using U.S. Census Records for Genealogical Research

“Why can’t I find my ancestor in the census?”

1. **The spelling of the names one is seeking may not be “correct” or consistent.**
 - Someone other than a family member supplied the information.
 - The enumerator wrote what he thought he heard.
 - The enumerator spelled the names phonetically.
 - Minors provided the information because parents weren’t available.
2. **The name(s) cannot be found in the index.**
 - The name is misspelled on the census record (see section above).
 - The indexer misspelled the name in the indexing process.
 - The indexer missed the name in the indexing process.
3. **The name(s) appears to have been missed on the census.**
 - The enumerator did not see the farm, house or dwelling.
 - The enumerator did not know people were living in a particular rural and/or secluded area.
 - No one was home when the enumerator came around, there was no one else around to ask, and he forgot to come back.
 - “It was a dark and stormy night...!”
4. **The information on the census schedule is not correct.**
 - The individual/family was not home so the enumerator obtained the information from a neighbor.
 - The individual was not interested enough to provide exact/precise detail or in some cases may have provided incorrect data on purpose.
 - The individual may not have known the exact information, e.g. his/her age, spelling of the name, etc.
 - The enumerator guessed at what individuals did not know or were unwilling to tell.
 - Minors provided the information because parents were not available.