

LOOK CLOSER! Think Outside but Look INSIDE those Boxes



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Prepared and Presented by Jean Wilcox Hibben – PhD, MA
Riverside County, California; 909-994-6114 <circlemending@gmail.com>
<www.circlemending.org> <www.circlemending.blogspot.com>

Information in this program relates to the “fields” found on various forms and records where demographic and other clarifying information is provided for the processing of the data. It is not to be confused with the “Check-the-Box” term, used for business entities to “elect how they will be classified, and therefore taxed, for federal income tax purposes” – Kolbie R. Deamon in *Union Leader*, 26 June 2022
<https://www.mclane.com/insights/know-the-law-what-does-it-mean-for-a-business-entity-to-check-the-box/>

For our purposes, the term “box” can also refer to . . .

- Lines to be filled in (names, locations, dates, etc.)
- Large spaces on forms, either enclosed or contained with boxes or lines
- Squares, circles – using check marks, Xs, or filled in:



Boxes can be found in . . .

- Indexes, transcriptions, or abstracts
- Databases
- Census records
- Vital Records
- Lists
- Roll sheets
- Search templates



Among other places

“I like boxes because of the secrets they hide.” – Kate Williams
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/kate_williams_749848?src=t_boxes

Accuracy of box marking is invaluable! Whether you are completing a search request or reading a document, what goes in or is omitted from the boxes can make or break a research project.

Not all boxes are filled in with - some places actually require person completing the information to squeeze data into the tiny space, such as some of the following:

Box marking may not be a check; information might include (but is not limited to) . . .

- Years as resident (less than 1, 1-5, etc.)
- Number of people living at the home (1, 2, 3, etc.)
- Speak/write in English (yes or no, or a simple check mark if answer is “yes”)
- Gender (M or F, though more recent demographic questions add other options)
- Age range (under 18, 18-25, 26-30, etc.) – some age ranges seem to overlap (18-25, 25-30, 30-35, etc.) be alert: if the age is, say, 25, consider confusion and check for both age groups, just in case the one completing it is confused
- Marital status (married, single – sometimes there is no other option)
- Dwelling (living in the city, living in an unincorporated area of county)
- Birth location (born in the state, born elsewhere in US, foreign born, etc.)
- Served in the military (yes or no)
 - If yes, which branch of service (N[avy], A[rmy], etc.) – not all options involve just a check mark; some very small boxes call for more information and the writing may be very tiny
 - Served in a war or expedition (yes or no)
 - If yes, which one (CW, Rev, VN, etc.)
- Worked in a government project (yes or no)
 - If yes, which one (WPA, CCC, etc.)
 - If yes, number of years – count partial years as 1 (1, 2, etc.)
- Need special assistance (yes or no)
 - If yes, what – check all boxes that apply (wheelchair, help walking, special diet, handicap facilities, etc.) and explain in space below
- Are any members of household enrolled in school (yes, no)
 - Insert number of students and what levels (2-GS, 1-C, or similar types of notation)
- Form filed with the XYZ office and date filed

While boxes can be found on many types of forms, genealogists often discover that knowledge of to what the boxes refer on, say, Census Schedules can lead a person to any number of discoveries (see the specifics below). However, many lines or boxes are for the purposes of tallying the data (one of the reasons for the Censuses in the first place) and knowing whether a “1-2-3” is used for the enumerators/tabulators or is for genealogical data, such as the number of people in a program or household, is important; just that simple knowledge can reduce research time significantly making findings relevant.

Federal Census records

Always check information on Census records against other census schedules for the family (in other years); never accept an age, occupation, name (or spelling of name), birth location, etc. from a single Census as being the accurate information about a person/family. Check for additional information about the family in the margins and even at the end of the enumerator’s report. And since Census responses may come from a neighbor or person living in the home but not fully aware of the circumstances of the residents, a simple check mark (or lack thereof) could easily lead the genealogist down a wrong path (if the box for “blind” is left unmarked, it doesn’t

mean that everyone in the home is sighted . . . not everyone wants to disclose certain bits of information, or the respondent may be unaware of that circumstance of a specific person).. Not included here are the expected spaces for names, marital status, immigration, occupation, and residence information; those, and other information in the various boxes, can be found at the US Census Bureau website at links below. Note: Federal Census Schedules prior to 1840 had some of the same as 1840, though, for most, there is much less data collected and the age divisions are not consistent from one decade to the next; be careful not to assume.

“Whereas today people often understate their age to Census takers, studies of past Censuses have revealed that they used to overstate it” – Atul Gawande
<https://www.wisefamousquotes.com/quotes-about-census/>

1950, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1950_population.html

Boxes 4-6 – Property questions, including farm information and corresponding number on the Agriculture Schedule

Boxes 15-20b – Occupation/employment questions; note

Box 20c – “Class of Worker” (P=Private employment, G=Government employment, O=Own business, NP=Working without pay)

Boxes 21-38 – Supplemental questions; be sure to check these if *anyone* in the family is included

1940, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1940_population.html

Boxes 21-24 – Work specifics, including the government programs

Box 25 – Specifics on other options (H=Home/housework, S=In school, U=Unable to work, Ot=Other)

Boxes 26-33 – Additional questions regarding employment and salary/income

Box 34 – Number of the person on the Farm Schedule, if applicable

Boxes 39-41 – Military/veteran questions including deceased parent who was a veteran (letter indicators for branch of military, see website above)

Boxes 42-47 – Social Security questions, including more specifics regarding employment, person’s industry, and class worker

Boxes 48-50 – *Marriage/children, including if person has been married more than once

---At the bottom of each page is a box that, when marked, indicates that the household tally is continued on the next page. Don’t overlook this!

*Question regarding births of children are for the responses of married women only; no way to identify illegitimate births

1930, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1930_1.html

Box 15 – Age at first marriage (but the one represented on the Schedule might not be his/her first marriage)

Box 16 – School attendance since 1 Sept 1929

Box 17 – Literacy

Box 21 – If immigrant, what language person spoke before coming to the US

Box 24 – If the person speaks English

Boxes 30-31 – Veteran status and, if veteran, war or expedition and which one

---Supplemental schedules deal with other status issues



1920, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1920_1.html

Box 12 – Marital status (S=single, Wd=widowed, D=divorced, M1=first marriage, M2=second or subsequent marriages)

Box 17 – Able to read

Box 18 – Able to write

Box 25 – Able to speak English (native tongue, if applicable, in prior question)

Boxes 26-29 – Questions dealing with occupation/employment, including corresponding Farm Schedule number

1910, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1910_1.html

Box 8 – Marital status (S=single, Wd=widowed, D=divorced, M1=first marriage, M2=second or subsequent marriages)

Box 9 – Number of years in current marriage

Boxes 10-11 – For women, number of children, number of living children (unclear whether all children noted are considered her biological offspring)

Box 17 – Able to speak English and, if not, what language is spoken

Boxes 18-22 – Occupation/employment questions

Boxes 23-24 – Literacy (read and write)

Boxes 26-29 – Residence questions

Box 30 – Question about Civil War – veteran of Union or Confederate and Army or Navy

Box 31-32 – Blind in both eyes, Deaf & dumb

---Additional questions for Native Americans, including blood quantum, are in the Indian Population Schedule

Specialty Census Schedules (e.g., Agriculture & 1890 Veterans) have boxes unique for the purposes of each; check these carefully.

1900, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1900_1.html

Box 7 – Date of birth (month and year)

Box 10 – If married, how many years has person been married (not clear if it's referring to all marriages or just the current one, as applicable)

Boxes 11-12 – For mothers, number of children the woman has had and how many are living

Boxes 22-23 – Literacy (read and write)

Boxes 25-28 – Residence questions

---Indian Population Schedule, as applicable

1880, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1880_1.html

First time a Federal Census lists who is head of household and the other inhabitants' relationships to him/her

Box 7 – If born during the Census year, add the month

Box 12 – Check if married within the Census year

Boxes 16-20 – Condition questions – blind; deaf/dumb; idiotic; insane; maimed, crippled, bedridden, or otherwise disabled

Boxes 22-23 – Literacy questions

“People resist a census,, but give them a profile page and they'll spend all day telling you who they are.” – Max Barry <https://quotlr.com/quotes-about-census>

1870, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1870_1.html

Boxes 11-12 – Check for parents if foreign born

Box 13 – If person was born during the last year, include which month

Box 14 – If person was married during the last year, include which month

Boxes 16-17 – Literacy questions

Box 18 – Handicapped (all inclusive: deaf/dumb, blind, insane, or idiotic)

Box 20 – If person is a male citizen, 21 or older, status of those unable to vote



1860, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1860_1.html

Box 11 – If person was married within the last year

Box 13 – If person is illiterate and over 20 years old

Box 14 – Unique circumstances (all inclusive: deaf/dumb, blind, idiotic, pauper, or convict)

1850, note unique boxes for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1850_1.html

Schedule No. 1 Lists all Free inhabitants of household

Schedule No. 2 Lists all Slave inhabitants

---No identification of relationships to head of household

1840 note unique headings for this year:

https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/index_of_questions/1840_1.html

The boxes separate people by gender and age group, slave or free

White persons deaf/dumb (separated by age), blind, insane, idiots (at public and private charge)

Colored persons deaf/dumb, blind, insane, and idiots (at public and private charge)

Education

White persons age 20 and older, not literate

“But the most precious research to me came from the paperwork filed on behalf of my grandparents and great-grandfather. The ship’s manifest showed that they could read and write. I am still emotional when I look at those boxes checked ‘yes.’” – Adriana Trigiani
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/adriana_trigiani_488711?src=t_boxes

Suggestions to keep the genealogist from going too far out of the boxes

- Spelling doesn’t count (the spelling of a name is subject to interpretation!)
- A second (third and even fourth) pair of eyes can be invaluable . . . get input from someone who is not part of the family (they tend to be less subjective)
- If someone questions your research, even if you are sure of it, proceed with investigation as to why there was doubt (you may have missed something or may be able to help the other person repair his/her errors)
- Just because information was provided by a family member or a professional does not mean it is guaranteed to be devoid of error

The insurance [or any other] industry communicates through codes and check-off boxes. If there's no check-off box for you, you don't exist." – Jack Anderson
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/jack_anderson_406073?src=t_boxes

Online Assistance for what information can be found on different records:

CyndisList.com (links to . . . just about anything, including more details on Census Schedules of the different formats and locations)

FamilySearch.org

HELPS: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/help/helpcenter/landing>

WIKI: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page

Standard list (Ancestry.com, Fold3.Com, Newspapers.com, etc.)

"We put limitations on the way that we think about things, on ourselves, think about all the boxes we live in, male or female, you're this age, that age, this is your job, this is not your job, everything is about getting boxed in." – Brit Marling
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/brit_marling_488599?src=t_boxes



GENEALOGY
The ultimate
puzzle box –
are your
ancestors
inside?