



Using Federal Census Resources

in the
California History Room

The California History Room has the federal census schedules on microfilm for the years 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930, **for California only**.

1850, 1860, 1870

These census years have **print indexes**, which are located in the Reference Collection. The 1850 census has two indexes, one by county and one statewide.

To use the print indexes:

1. Look up the surname, and locate the proper person by first name and age.
2. Write down the **county** and **all of the numbers** given, along with what each number represents (page, enumeration district, etc.), or photocopy the page.
3. At the Information Desk, request the census reel for the county and enumeration district given in the index.
4. Search the reel for the enumeration district, page, and any other numbers from the index.

We also have electronic indexes for California and other western states for both the 1850 and 1860 censuses.

Note: The **1850 census** lacks the counties of Contra Costa, San Francisco, and Santa Clara.

1880, 1900, 1910, 1920

These census years have **Soundex indexes**.

The Soundex is a coded surname (last name) index based on the way a surname sounds rather than the way it is spelled. Surnames that sound the same, but are spelled differently, like SMITH and SMYTH, have the same code and are filed together. Every Soundex code consists of a letter and three numbers, such as W-123 (Webster). The letter is always the first letter of the surname.

To use the Soundex indexes:

1. In the *Soundex Reference Guide* (located on the top of the Reference shelves), find the Soundex code for the surname. Write it down.
2. At the Information Desk, request the Soundex reel that contains the code you want.
3. Locate the code on the reel. **Within the code, names are arranged by first name.** (Ignore the surnames.) Locate the proper person by first name and age.
4. Write down the **county** and **all of the numbers** given, along with what each number represents (page, enumeration district, etc.), or print a copy of the card. Refer to the example on the other side of this sheet
5. At the Information Desk, request the census reel for the county and enumeration district given in the index.
6. Search the reel for the enumeration district, page, and any other key numbers from the index.

