Who Lived in My House?

Using City Directories, Census, and Courthouse Records

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There are numerous ways to find information about your house/property and the people who lived there before you. Some resources will vary by location but the principles of research and many of the potential sources remain the same wherever you are looking.

City Directories provide basic information about the community as well as giving you a specific location at a specific time. These directories usually contain the alphabetical listing of names, an alphabetical listing of street names with the people at each address, a classified listing of businesses and organizations, abbreviations listings that help you understand the entries, and much more. For the alphabetical street listings, cross streets are included and tell you exactly what block the house you are looking for is on.

City directories pre-date telephone directories; how far back they go, depends on the community and when they started there. City directories only cover the specific area defined at the time the contract was made to create the directory. In some places in the mid-west that are predominantly rural, there are county directories.

Issues to be aware of:

- Streets were renumbered.
- Streets were renamed.
- Only the most urban areas were usually covered. Early directories might list businesses, factories, etc. in the county or the area outside the prescribed contract area. However, there usually is not a street/road listing by address or a listing by people's names outside that described area. In Clarke County, until relatively recently, people's addresses were by rural route numbers.
- In Athens, the city limit boundaries changed from time to time and usually the city directories showed the addition of this land in the street listings and listings of people. But sometimes, the directory compilers did not expand the area they covered in the next directory, so watch for lapses and discrepancies.
- Sometimes the directory companies or their employees did not do a thorough job of verifying the information, so information might be a year or so off.

Census records (Population Schedules) put people in a place at a specific time. Federal Population Schedules have been taken every 10 years since 1790 when George Washington was in office and the federal government realized it needed to know how many people lived

here and where they lived. Over the centuries, some states also conducted additional censuses for a variety of reasons.

The federal census takers were given exact instructions and a specific amount of time to conduct the census. In the early decades, they provided their own supplies, quill pens, ink, etc. However, people did not always follow the instructions.

Information from the census varies for numerous reasons and can be more or less accurate and reliable. Keep this in mind when using the census. The raw data from each census is tabulated and utilized as soon as possible after each census. The detailed information on each person is protected by privacy law for 72 years after the census date of each census.

The website www.1930census.com, which provides information about all the censuses, is a great resource for detailed information. The chart that follows is copied from that website.

No.	Census Year	Census Date	Total U.S. Population	No. of States	U.S. President
16	1940	April 1st	132,164,569	48	Franklin D. Roosevelt
15	1930	April 1st	123,202,624	48	Herbert Hoover
14	1920	Jan 1st	106,021,537	48	Woodrow Wilson
13	1910	April 15th	92,228,496	46	William Howard Taft
12	1900	June 1st	76,212,168	45	William McKinley
11	1890	June 1st	62,979,766	44	Benjamin Harrison
10	1880	June 1st	50,189,209	38	Rutherford B. Hayes
9	1870	June 1st	38,558,371	37	Ulysses S. Grant
8	1860	June 1st	31,443,321	33	James Buchanan
7	1850	June 1st	23,191,876	30	Millard Fillmore
6	1840	June 1st	17,069,453	26	Martin Van Buren
5	1830	June 1st	12,866,020	24	Andrew Jackson
4	1820	Aug 7th	9,638,453	23	James Monroe
3	1810	Aug 6th	7,239,881	17	James Madison
2	1800	Aug 4th	5,308,483	16	John Adams

1	1790	Aug 2nd	3,929,214	13	George Washington

The 1940 census information was released April 2, 2012, and is the first census to be released/published only in digital format. The full information from the 1950 census will be released April 2, 2022 since census day for 1950 was April 1.

For additional detailed information about the federal census go to these websites:

- The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) - https://www.archives.gov/research/census.
- U.S. Census Bureau - http://www.census.gov/ to learn about schedules other than the population schedules and the current censuses being taken today other than the decennial census.
- And http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/ gives you detailed information census year by census year including specific instructions to census takers, questions asked, and an overview of each census and the various schedules taken.

Government has always needed information to help plan for future needs and to evaluate changes in the country. 1940 census, for instance, was the first time there was a separate schedule (Census of Occupied Dwellings) with questions designed to gain information about housing stock in the US. Using this information, that is not part of the population schedule, can help you get a general idea about how your house compared to others in the area.

A variety of different schedules have been used over time to provide information needed by the government. Some of these schedules are online at the above websites; much print and textual material is also available in MAGIL (Map and Government Information Library) in the sub-basement of the UGA Main Library. The University of Georgia Libraries is a regional depository for government documents and has been for many decades. Government documents are a rich resource for contextual community information for house history.

Census Enumeration District maps are available for most counties. Some are available online at the National Archives catalog https://catalog.archives.gov/. However, the Heritage Room has the microfilm for these maps for Georgia.

Courthouse Records can be used along with the city directories and census records. Tax lists, deeds, estate records of all kinds, land records including plats, and much more may need to be added to your arsenal.

Clarke County Probate Court – A *Finding Aid to Probate Court Records, Clarke County Georgia* is located in the Heritage Room in the local history area. Call number is **GR 929.3758 Clarke CLARKE.** This book can also be viewed online at the Clarke County Probate Court website https://www.athensclarkecounty.com/1155/Records-Finding-Aid, This was a joint project completed by volunteers at the request of Probate Judge Susan Tate to identify the records that were the responsibility of the Probate Court. The responsibilities of this office have varied over time and the name changed as well having been formerly called Ordinary or Inferior Court among other names. The Heritage Room wrote the proposal and volunteers from Clarke-Oconee Genealogical Society and Athens Historical Society worked to locate, inventory, flatten, clean, folder and enter into a database the holdings of the Clarke County Probate Court.

If your person or the property you are researching is in the city limits, there are also city tax lists. People who lived in the city paid both city and county taxes. These books used to be in the vault that is next to the Mayor's office in City Hall.

Many estate records are on microfilm in the Heritage Room. Returns and mixed records often record estate settlements including dispersal of property. Sometimes deeds are not recorded for many years after a transfer; these other kinds of records can provide more timely information.

For Superior Court – Deeds, indexes to deeds, plats, and much more are on 4th floor in the Clerk of Court's offices. Indexes to deeds and the deeds up until mid-1960s are on microfilm in the Heritage Room.

Rural areas- area not in "city" limits

For rural land (or land in the area that not in the city limits) city directories will be of little or no use. More recent city directories cover areas outside the "Athens" city limits and include surrounding towns and counties in some instances. For further back in time, census records may help identify people who live nearby and help you identify property in tax lists and deed records.

Militia districts are very helpful in Georgia in placing people in an area. Taxes and many other records in each county were listed by militia districts. So if a person owned 7 pieces of property, knowing which militia district your house/property was in can help you narrow your search.

The Clarke Oconee Genealogical Society (COGS) website lists militia districts in some different time frames that may be helpful. COGS also published books of tax digests; these books are a quick and dirty way to get to the right tax books at the courthouse. Copies of these books are in the Heritage Room and at Hargrett Library research room.

Go to http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~gacogs/, then choose Search, then militia districts. Another map that you may find useful is at the Georgia Archives website. http://vault.georgiaarchives.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/hmf/id/47/rec/4 or you can search at the www.Georgiaarchives.org website in the Virtual Vault using terms minor civil divisions or militia districts.

Militia districts were created early in Georgia's history since there was no local police department, other law enforcement, or military to defend against enemies. Districts were called by the local militia captain's name. This was confusing since there might be six Captain Smith's militia districts on the muster rolls that were sent into the state of Georgia. So in 1804 Georgia numbered all the districts, that way the state knew exactly which militia district was reporting what. These are still marked on many maps as GMD (General Militia District).

Do not confuse militia districts with census enumeration districts.