

The Star-Spangled War

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PastFinder



Capture of H.M. Ships Cyane & Levant, by the U.S. Frigate Constitution, Lithograph by James Queen after a painting by Thomas Birch, published circa the mid-19th century by P.S. Duval, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (Wikimedia image, public domain.)

By Janet Brigham

Some historians call the War of 1812 a forgotten war. Some say it had ambiguous beginnings and an uncertain outcome. In the 200 years since the war between the United States and Britain/Canada began, the two-year conflict has been remembered primarily because of the creation of the U.S. national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and the victories of the U.S. Frigate *Constitution*.

No matter what historians conclude, the war was fought by individuals on all sides who risked their lives and sometimes lost them. Finding remnants and records of those lives can be challenging — and, like the outcome of the war, can benefit from serendipity.

The war erupted while Britain and France were already in a lengthy conflict. The 1812-1814 war in North America was comparatively brief but

complex. Soldiers and sailors on the U.S. side were not necessarily in organized regiments or even in state militias. Consequently, some American combatants’ records of service are scattered and spotty. The war also involved Britons, Canadians, and Native Americans, making the genealogical path seem daunting. As if that weren’t enough, some who fought on Britain’s side were newly minted Americans who had been impressed into the British Navy against their will.

(Continued on page 2)

Outside and Inside

- War of 1812 200th anniversary, above
- How I found it, page 4
- Ask the doc: GEDCOM, page 6
- 1940 U.S. Census update, page 7
- Upcoming meetings, page 8

War of 1812 (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

Historians generally agree that impressment was one underlying cause of the war. It involved the practice — legal in Britain for centuries — of so-called press gangs kidnapping potential sailors and pressing them into military service. Britain used the practice to populate its military and considered it a necessary and justifiable tradition.

However, when Britain captured Americans and pressed them into British service against their will, the United States was outraged. Some historians indicate that tens of thousands of American males were thus pressed into British military service. Evidently Britain considered Americans to still be British, even decades after the Revolutionary War. In fact, some British and Canadian historians confess to being baffled by the American thirst for liberty.

Tracking the records of impressed sailors is just one of the many difficulties in finding traces of your War of 1812 ancestor. A good place to start your War of 1812 genealogy search is a history book or online historical overviews. To understand how your ancestors may have been involved in the war, you'll want to understand basic facts about the war's arenas. A thorough, well regarded history of the war is Donald

R. Hickey's *The War of 1812: A forgotten conflict* (Bicentennial edition, 2012, University of Illinois Press; not available as an e-book). A popular account is Walter Borneman's *1812: The war that forged a nation* (HarperCollins, 2004; available as Kindle or Nook e-book). Many other useful sources reflecting U.S., Canadian or British perspectives are in print.

In many respects, learning more about the war probably is easier than learning about those who fought in it and were otherwise affected by it. George K. Schweitzer's *War of 1812 genealogy* (2004; available from familyrootspublishing.com and other online booksellers; not available as an e-book) provides a historical overview as well as explanations of various types of U.S. records. He includes sources for British and Canadian soldiers as well.

Records from the War of 1812 are not all readily available online. At this writing, indexed War of 1812 pension files are only 3% complete on Fold3.com, a major source of military records online. The War of 1812 Pension Application Files Index, 1812-1815, is searchable and browsable at Ancestry.com; the records are from the U.S. National Archives. Also on Ancestry are records of prisoners of war.

Nonetheless, many who fought in the war are not

(Continued on page 3)



Cover of sheet music (left) for "The Star-Spangled Banner" with words by Francis Scott Key (above). Philadelphia: G. Andre & Co., 1862. Key's text describes the bombardment of Fort McHenry at Baltimore, Maryland, a decisive point in the war. (Wikimedia image, public domain.)

(Continued from page 2)

listed in federal records. It's best to take a systematic approach to finding War of 1812 ancestors. The research wiki at FamilySearch provides a useful roadmap. Go to familysearch.org, select Learn, Research Wiki, and enter *Beginning War of 1812 research*. Also, a general search in the research wiki for *United States in the War of 1812* brings up many links and explanations.

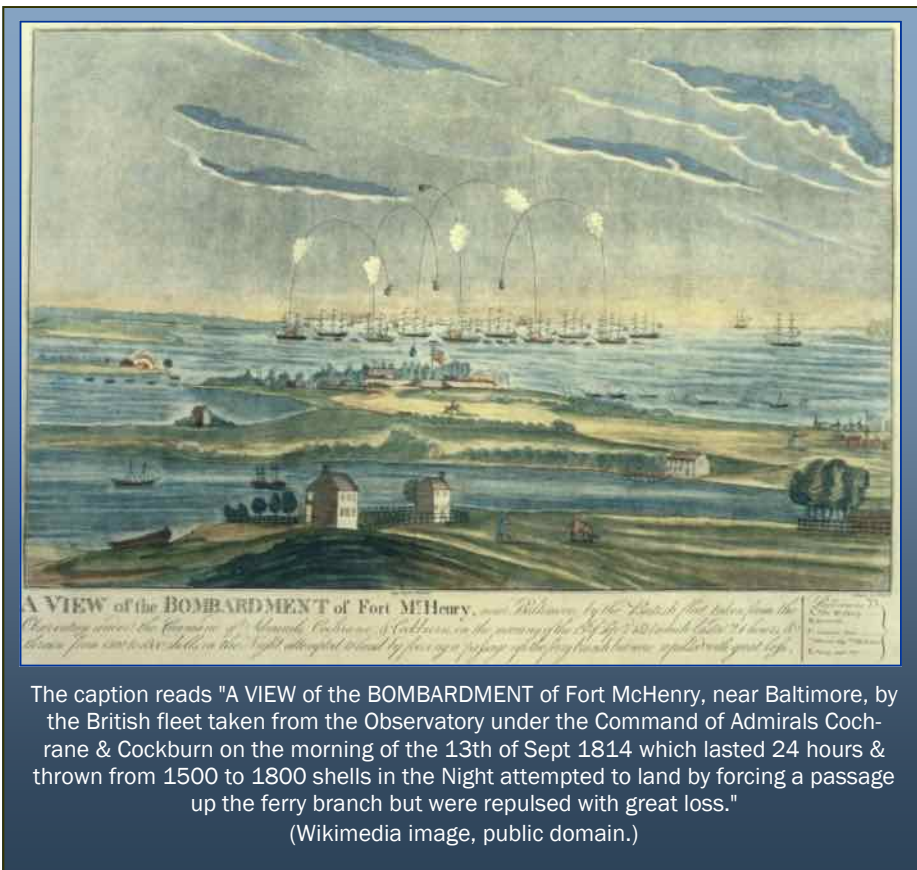
The wiki recommends that you first identify ancestors who might have served, specifically men between ages 18 and 30 during the war. You can generate a report from your database to identify them. (By the way, this is a reason that it's important to build and maintain your own database rather than keep all your information in an online tree where reports may be difficult or impossible to generate.)

As you identify possible candidates for searching, note where they were living in 1812. You can use the 1810 U.S. Census (free index at familysearch.org, records at ancestry.com) to search for the family.

Next find the soldier's regiment and company. At Archives.gov, search for *War of 1812 discharge certificates*. The resulting links connect to lists of units, subunits, commanders, and soldiers, and give useful overviews of available information. Not finding a name on these lists does not mean that your ancestor didn't serve; it merely means that the name is not in the list. If the name is there, so much the better. If not, look elsewhere, such as the many sources that appear when you search the wiki for *United States in the War of 1812*.

Knowing where your U.S. ancestor lived in 1812 will enable you to check the research wiki and other online sources for information in a given state. Militia information may be available through state-related sites.

Finding Canadian, British, and Native American combatants from the War of 1812 is a different task.



The caption reads "A VIEW of the BOMBARDMENT of Fort McHenry, near Baltimore, by the British fleet taken from the Observatory under the Command of Admirals Cochrane & Cockburn on the morning of the 13th of Sept 1814 which lasted 24 hours & thrown from 1500 to 1800 shells in the Night attempted to land by forcing a passage up the ferry branch but were repulsed with great loss."

(Wikimedia image, public domain.)

Searching the research wiki for *Canada in the War of 1812* yields a page of links. To find British links, search the research wiki for *Great Britain in the War of 1812*. No comparable wiki page details Native American (or, in Canadian parlance, First Nations) involvement in the war. Even so, numerous historical accounts detail their participation, which was on the Canadian/British side of the war for the most part. The same is true of Blacks who had escaped slavery in the United States, sought refuge in Canada, and fought the United States to avoid re-enslavement.

Some War of 1812 ancestors show up only in family lore. The story came down across several generations that an ancestor in my Brigham line had served in the War of 1812 and had been taken prisoner by the British. However, when I first began searching for him in military records, his name wasn't there. What did emerge, though, was an old newspaper article that mentioned him.

For the rest of that story — as harrowing a documented tale as any other in my family's history — watch this space next month. 

How I Found It: *Untangling stepchildren*

By Richard Rands

Sometimes our difficult genealogical dead ends are caused by surnames that lend themselves to lots of spelling variations, or are incredibly common surnames. Sometimes variations of the given names can head us off in many different directions. Sometimes dates are so far off that we are searching in the wrong decade or even century. In some cases the place names give us fits because the city's name is duplicated in counties, states, provinces, or countries over and over again. Myriad additional mysteries can cause a dead end, including erroneous relationships, missing maiden names, unavailable record collections, undocumented sources, or unreadable documents.

Then once in awhile all these problems seem to come together in one colossal dead end. Recently I was challenged with one of those circumstances. Janet and I were sitting at the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group's booth at the Northern California Family History Expo in Sacramento, California, busily extolling the merits of our award-winning *PastFinder* newsletter, when a fellow stopped by and told me about his family history dead end.

Since I love a challenge, he came back with documents showing what he already knew and what he wanted to discover. The details were so conflicting that my friend was certain that his ancestor had purposefully tried to hide something in his past.

This dead end is not a distant peripheral ancestor five or six generations back. It is a direct-line grandfa-

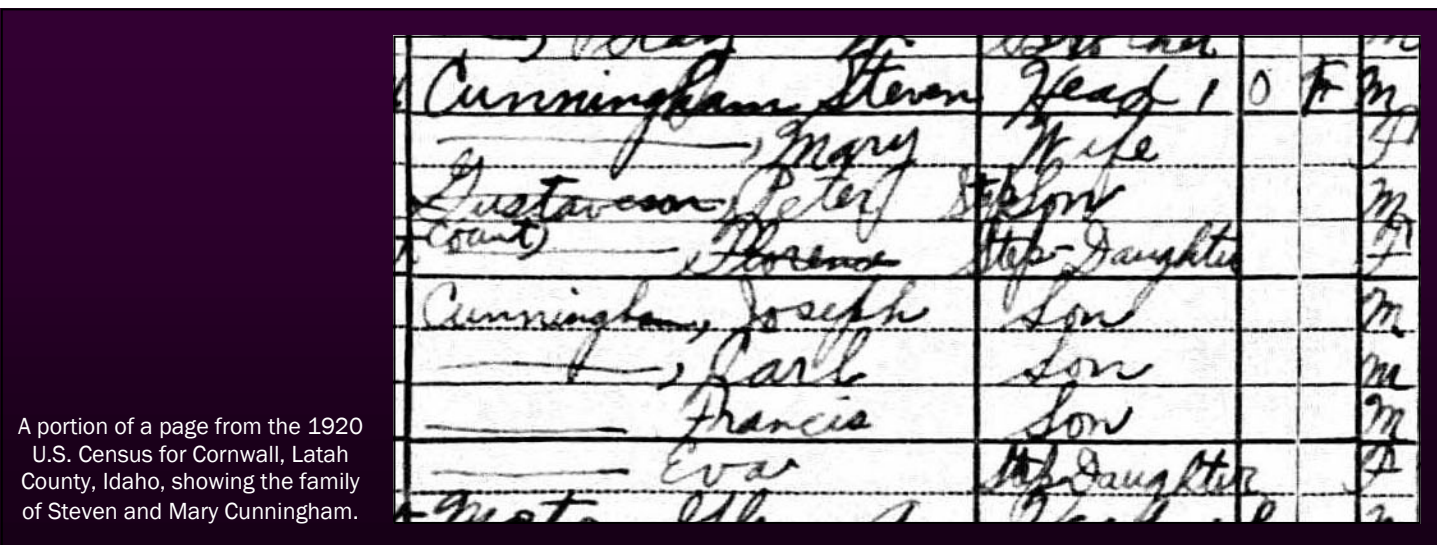
ther, a Steven Cunningham, probably born in Canada, emigrated to Wisconsin, and married at least twice, with a family consisting of his children and stepchildren from both wives. In later years, the family appeared to include children, grandchildren, and children from stepchildren.

All of which is clouded by the classical causes of dead ends. Various census records claimed Steven's birth place was in Canada, while others said it was Wisconsin. One census listed an age implying birth in 1860, while others pointed to birth in 1870. After hours of grinding through the evidence, chasing leads, testing numerous theories, and discovering bits and pieces of new evidence in hitherto unknown documents, I was unable to break through the brick wall.

Although the dead end is still an unyielding brick wall, a number of baffling questions come up along the way, so some clarification has been achieved. For example, in the 1905 Wisconsin State Census for Greenwood, Wisconsin, we find Annie Gustavson, the widow of Gustave Gustavson, and the daughter of Peter and Brynmel Svardal. The record listed her three sons by Gustav and indicated that she owned a home free of mortgage — an unusual circumstance for a woman at the beginning of the 20th century. In the same census for the same town, we find Steven Cunningham, a single man, working in mid-April as a day farm laborer. On 29 June 1905, about six weeks later, we find Annie and Steven married.

A number of baffling
questions have come up
along the way.

(Continued on page 5)



A portion of a page from the 1920 U.S. Census for Cornwall, Latah County, Idaho, showing the family of Steven and Mary Cunningham.

My friend had concluded that Gustave Gustavson must have been wealthy enough to have purchased outright the property that he had left to his widow. However, on a hunch based on the facts that Greenwood, Wisconsin, was in remote, unpopulated part of northern Wisconsin, not where a wealthy person would normally purchase property, that Gustave was an emigrant from Sweden, and that the time frame was well after the Homestead Act, I decided to check the Bureau of Land Management database for a land patent.

Sure enough, two homestead patents in Wisconsin in an area just north of Greenwood were granted to Gustave in December 1893, 11 years before he died. The two adjacent parcels were located in section 20 of Township 46N, Range 4W, the east half of the northeast and southeast quarters. A look on Google Earth at the present-day land shows that it is still a sparsely populated area with field boundaries corresponding to the land as it probably was in 1893. We see no evidence that Gustave was a wealthy man.

One of the more challenging census records pertaining to Steven Cunningham appeared in the 1920 U.S. Census for the town of Cornwall, Latah County, Idaho, where Steven had relocated after Annie died, presumably because the land in Wisconsin was considerably less desirable for a farmer than the fertile soil of the Palouse in Latah County in northern Idaho. Cornwall is now part of the town of Moscow, Idaho.


In the image below, we see that Steven had remarried and now have a wife named Mary. The three sons of Steven from his first wife were listed — Joseph,

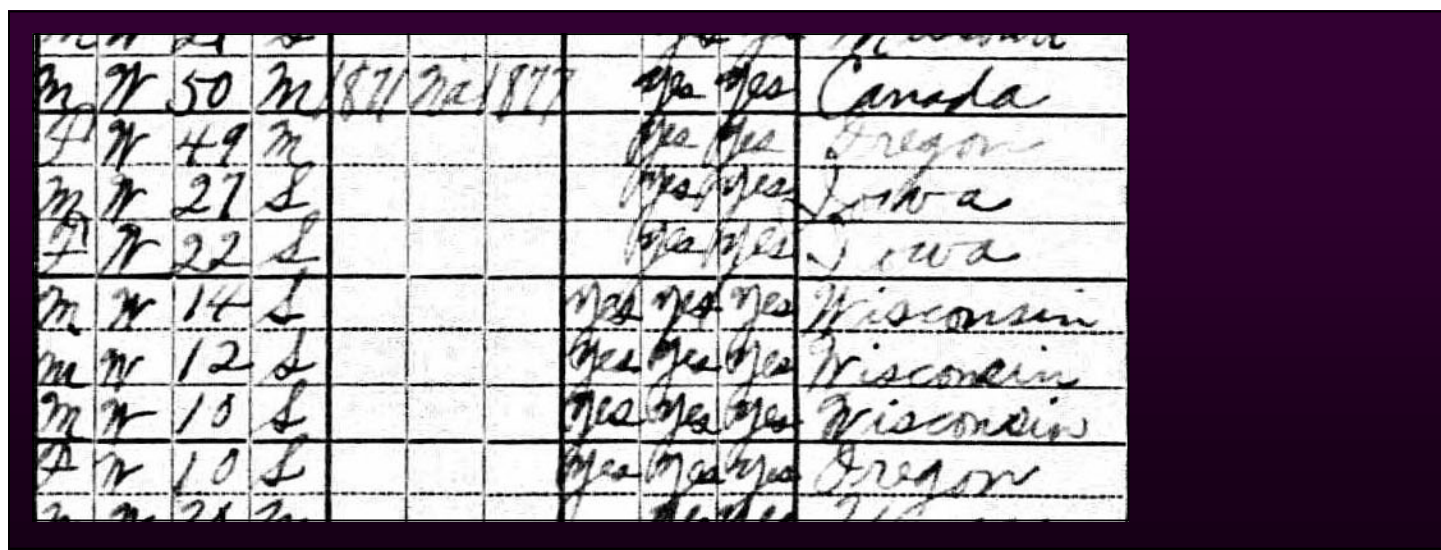
Carl, and Francis — after two of the three Gustavson stepchildren from the first wife's previous marriage, Peter and Florence. The other stepson was listed elsewhere in the census, suggesting that the property in Wisconsin may have been sold rather than passed to Annie's family. The ages, birthplaces, and birthplaces of the parents all lined up perfectly with previous censuses.

But one more child appeared at the bottom of the listing for the household. Listed as a Cunningham, 10-year-old Eva was recorded as a stepdaughter, born in Oregon, where Steven's second wife, Mary, was born. Furthermore, Eva's father was born in Iowa, and her mother was born in Oregon.

The fact that Eva was a stepdaughter with a father born in Iowa rules out Steven as her father. Since her mother was born in Oregon, rather than Minnesota, we can rule out Annie as her mother. In the 1910 census, about the time that Eva probably was born, Steven was still married to Annie.

So the questions now are when after the 1910 census did Annie die, and how soon afterward did Steven marry Mary. In addition, we need to know exactly when in 1909 or 1910 Eva was born. The timing of these events will determine whether Eva was a daughter of Mary from a previous marriage, or perhaps was another child Mary brought into the marriage.

Of course, the fact that Eva was recorded as a Cunningham raises the possibility that Steven adopted her. But documents that could validate and support all of these assumptions have yet to be discovered. We hope to make more discoveries soon. 



M	W	50	M	1877	2nd 1877	Yes	Yes	Canada
F	W	49	M			Yes	Yes	Oregon
M	W	27	F			Yes	Yes	Iowa
F	W	22	F			Yes	Yes	Iowa
M	W	14	F			Yes	Yes	Wisconsin
M	W	12	F			Yes	Yes	Wisconsin
M	W	10	F			Yes	Yes	Wisconsin
F	W	10	F			Yes	Yes	Oregon
M	W	21	M					



Ask the doctor GEDCOM, Entering information

Q I have heard that it is risky to use a GEDCOM to transfer my information from PAF (on my PC) to Reunion on my new Mac. Is my fear justified? Should I just re-enter the information manually?

GEDCOM is an imperfect way to port data from one software program to another (PC or MAC) and might not provide the complete or most accurate translation of your data.

So you are right, 100% of the data might not transfer exactly. But most of it will. It will be up to you to determine whether a 90% to 95% (?) transfer is adequate and whether you are willing to go through it and clean up the rest. Or whether, if your file is small enough, you are willing to re-enter it by hand.

I know several people who felt that they had been collecting information for so long without a disciplined approach to entering sources or cross-checking data that transferring to a new program was a good time to start over and do it right. That last option is taking on a big project but might be something that makes sense depending on where you are with your research.

Or you might do a hybrid of the two. Make the GEDCOM transfer and then go through each entry and ensure that your sources are good and that the information transferred accurately. For this, you might think about creating family group sheets *before* leaving PAF, so that you'll know what the new file should look like.

I recommend that you read "Importing GEDCOM files into Reunion" and "GEDCOM Limitations" sections in the Reunion manual so that you can familiarize yourself with what the developers consider limitations, and also so that you'll have the instructions for the data transfer.

These instructions assume that you already have Reunion 10 on your Mac. If you still have questions after reading these two sections perhaps you can join us in our Reunion Basics class on July 14.

Q How do you recommend entering place information? I use the City, County, State format. My style sheet notes that locations are assumed to be in the United

States unless otherwise stated. Do you put USA on the end of all of your places? I would rather go in and make the additions at this point than do it 10 years down the road.

Also, how do you enter cemetery information? I have been entering City, County, State in the burial field and then, in the memo field, put the cemetery name, such as Riverside Cemetery.

Since you cannot sort on the memo field, it does not provide a clean opportunity to sort by cemetery, but then it feels like a violation to list the cemetery name in front of the City. What is the best practice?


First off, let me say that no one knows what new standards will be in place 10 years down the road. Ten years is a lotta years. I have always adhered to the format you use: City, County/Province, State, Country, leaving USA off the entry when it applies.

I abhor abbreviations.

I have been conflicted by this all along because I abhor abbreviations, but it seems presumptuous to use country names only when they are foreign to USA Americans. I have not seen any official change in this standard, although I have seen many circumstances where USA has been included in data located on FamilySearch.org records.

Incidentally, do a web search on the phrase "United States of Argentina" including the quotation marks and you will get something like 55,000 hits (even though the term is a political commentary and not a current name for Argentina). As popular as the term seems to be, you would be hard pressed to find someone anywhere in the world who would be confused by USA, including Argentina.

For cemeteries, I enter the name of the cemetery in front of the city, rather than in the notes or memo field. However, I usually enter *City Cemetery* when the official name is the same as the city's name, or I enter the actual cemetery name when the cemetery is not named after the city. I have seen occasions when a comma before the city in the burial place field is used as a place holder when the name of the cemetery is unknown, eliminating any ambiguity.

However you choose to do it, you should be consistent. 

1940 U.S. Census: What's happening?

By Allin Kingsbury

The 1940 U.S. Census was released to the public on April 2 this year when it reached the required age of 72 years. On that day, two major indexing projects were begun; they involved entering into computers enough information to make each person's record identifiable. The accumulated data are becoming two a searchable indexes of all the individuals in the census.

When ready, these indices will be available on the Internet to be searched by name, birth date, birth place and other criteria. Once found, the census data can be read from the original image. This step is important because the cursive handwritten records can be difficult to decipher and are occasionally misread by those doing the indexing. Our readers will want to know how much of the data is available, where the data can be found, and what the data can do for their family history research.

One indexing project is being done by Ancestry.com. This company operates a website with a huge collection of genealogical data that subscribers can search. They have all the U.S. censuses through 1930 plus the states that they have completed for the 1940 census. As of my latest look in the last week of June, Ancestry.com has completed Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Nevada, New York, Colorado, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia.

The other indexing project is being conducted by a joint effort that includes FamilySearch.org, Archives.com, and FindMyPast. While Ancestry.com has hired workers to do the indexing, The 1940 Community Project has more than 100,000 volunteers who index. Their procedure, which is to have each page of census data indexed independently by two volunteers, and if there are differences in the indexed data, to assign a more experienced arbitrator to resolve differences of opinion, is said to produce more accurate

You can search for individuals in the indexed states of the 1940 U.S. Census through the FamilySearch.org general search (left) and browse records from states with incomplete indexing (below).



data. The Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group is part of this indexing project, and we have made a significant contribution.

The results from the volunteers with The 1940 Community Project have been amazing. In 3.5 months, the census is about 90% indexed and searchable online. In a one-day challenge on July 2, the indexers more than doubled the goal of indexing and arbitrating five million records in a 24-hour period. The status of the indexing by state can be seen at familysearch.org/1940census/.

Both the 1940 Community Project and Ancestry.com incorporate the indexed portions of the 1940 census into their overall search. FamilySearch.org also allows searching of indexed states and browsing of records of states with incomplete indexing.

While most of the information in the 1940 census is similar to that found in earlier census data, there are

(Continued on page 8)

1940 U.S. Census (Continued)

(Continued from page 7)

some new features. One question asked is where each individual lived in 1935. The Great Depression and the Dust Bowl of 1934 to 1936 displaced many people who traveled far to find work. The population of the United States had reached 132 million. People were moving from small cities and towns to the large industrial centers in the northern and western states where jobs were more plentiful.

Another feature is the mark used by the census enumerator to indicate who supplied the information. This often depended on who was home when the enumerator came, and is a factor that indicates the reliability of the information. You also have a good measure of the affluence of the family because in-


come for the year 1939 is recorded in the census.

The census also asked whether the individual worked for the Works Progress Administration, the National Youth Administration, or the Civilian Conservation Corps during 24-30 March 1940.

Another new feature is the supplementary questionnaire at the bottom of each page. Two individuals from each page answered additional questions.

This supplementary information is not indexed, but as the image is examined, one can see if anyone of interest was asked to answer the questions by looking at the bottom of the page. Five percent of the population, or about 6,600,000 individuals, filled it out. Much of this information is useful to genealogists.

It is not too late to do indexing. You can sign up by sending an email to the group through svcgg.org. It is an enjoyable and enlightening experience. Many of the individuals in the 1940 census are living. Information for this time period is limited and can be difficult to obtain. The 1940 census is a valuable addition to the genealogical records available for our use.

Good luck with adding the 1940 census to your family history research. 

About the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group

SVCGG is the former Silicon Valley PAF Users Group, a nonprofit group of some 600 genealogy enthusiasts. The group is based in Silicon Valley in the Bay Area of northern California, but members live all over the world.

SVCGG offers classes, seminars, and publications to help family historians improve their skills in using

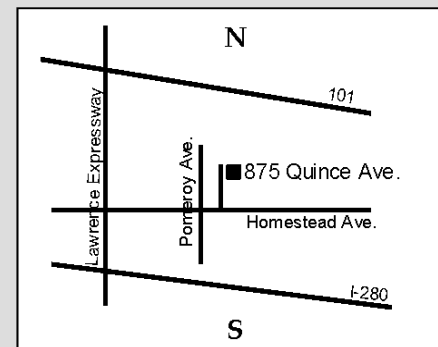
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Meeting site has ample free off-street parking, with a wheelchair-accessible entrance near the front of the building.


Upcoming meetings

The group meets monthly except December, on the second Saturday of the month from 9 to 11 A.M. at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 875 Quince Ave., Santa Clara, California (see map at right). The group is not affiliated with any church.

14 July 2012, 9–11 A.M.

- Opening session: A new app
- Research with newspapers (Richard Rands)
- Photo editing with PicMonkey and other cool things (Janet Brigham)
- Reunion 10 for Mac (Pat Burrow)
- Mac Reunion basics (Pat Solomon)
- Getting started in genealogy (Gloria Christine)

11 August 2012, 9–11 A.M.

- Putting flesh on the bones (Pamela Erickson)
- GenSmarts (Richard Rands)
- Reunion 10 for Mac
- Mac Reunion basics
- Getting Started in genealogy 

technology for genealogy research.

PastFinder, the official publication of the Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group, is published monthly except December. *PastFinder* is distributed at meetings to members and mailed to others after the meetings. Members can receive the newsletter electronically by emailed download link. 