



# THE DUTCHESS NEWSLETTER

Dutchess County Genealogical Society

P. O. Box 708, Poughkeepsie, New York 12602-0708

<http://www.dcgs-gen.org>

Vol. 13, No. 1

Fall, September, 2004

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### • President's Notes

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I have discovered "blogging" this summer. Blog is short for web log. Web logs are web pages that are frequently updated, and, in this case contain interesting information with commentary from the blogger on genealogical topics. If you find yourself online a lot and want to keep up with genealogical news & gossip, you might look at <http://www.genealogyblog.com>. Richard Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter is now being published daily, and is also offered in a kind of blog format. He can be found at <http://eogn.typepad.com>.

I recently finished a book called *"Measuring America: How the United States was shaped by the greatest land sale in history"* by Andro Linklater (Harper Collins, 2003). It talks about more than just surveying, but that is the focus, with detail on how a surveyor actually works. The way we measured out our land affected the settlement patterns that we can still see on the face of the land today. It is very readable, and I think anyone interested in adding historical background and understanding to their genealogical research will enjoy it.

Speaking of historical background - **Dutchess County is still without a County Historian**, and Ginny Buechele is again lobbying our county government to appoint and fund the office. The board of DCGS decided to add our voice to her effort and I have signed her petition to the county executive asking that one be appointed. You can sign it online at <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Acres/2843/>.

### More on Using the Census

Background - why a Federal Census at all

The Federal government has taken a census of its citizens every 10 years since 1790 because the requirement was written into the constitution. Its purpose was 1) to determine how

members of the House of Representatives would be apportioned among the states; and 2) to guarantee that any direct tax levied by the Federal government on the people stayed in proportion to the census. This was part of the checks and balance system - if states were tempted to exaggerate their size for greater representation in the Congress, they might also have to pay more taxes. Or an attempt to evade taxes by underestimating population would lead to less representation.

The apportionment rule as written in the Constitution required a separate determination of the free, slave and Indian populations of the states. Slaves only represented 3/4 of a free person (and there were slaves in Dutchess County). Indians who maintained a residence and lived within the community were counted in the census; Indians who lived on reservations or as part of their own separate community were not taxed and were not counted in the earlier censuses. There were no reservations, and apparently very few Indians, in Dutchess County by 1790.

### Why search the census?

Often there is no other contemporaneous source that can give you such a regular detailed "snapshot" of a family over time. Of course, this is more obvious when using the later censuses which have much more specific information, but even the early censuses can give you hints about the family if you work at it hard enough. What's more - not only does it give you a snapshot of your family, it gives you the same view of everyone in the whole neighborhood, of the whole town, of the wider community as far out as you want to go. And we have never had so many tools to work with on this source as we do now, with the prospect of even more in the future.

The classic advice in searching the census has been to "Record Everything!" Take down information on anyone of your surname in the area, not just your direct ancestor. Look at the neighbors because those families may be the source of a spouse you haven't yet found; or they may be the group your family travels with to settle in a new area 3 states away. With the index sources that exist today, this is easier and less tedious to do than ever before.

In researching common names, the census can help eliminate those which do not fit, so searches in other sources are less time-consuming. Alternatively, being aware of everyone with your surname of interest is extra warning that you have to be alert not to mix together different families who have the

same name. And, again, that is easier than ever to determine because of the number of census indexes that now exist.

#### 1790-1840

The first 6 censuses are usually treated together because they are similar - the household was the basic unit counted. The only name taken was that of the head of the household (for organizational purposes) and everyone else just shows up as a number.

Do not assume that the head of household is the oldest person in the house. Do not assume that everyone in the household is a member of the nuclear family or even related - what about servants, visitors or boarders, grandchildren, nieces & nephews, widowed mothers or fathers-in-law.

Remember that there was no requirement for the census taker to consult actual records or talk directly to a member of the household. Listing data from the enumerator's personal knowledge or from the neighbor's information can result in wildly different data from census to census. Even household members might not know the answers to some of the questions.

The term "population schedule" refers to the forms that contain names and information about households and individuals collected in a house-to-house canvass. There have been, in addition, various other schedules called non-population schedules which include censuses of manufactures, agricultural schedules, industrial schedules, mortality schedules, and veteran's schedules. I'll refer to those later.

As one of the earliest settled areas of the new country, Dutchess County did not have some of the problems other counties or states had in taking the census. The county boundaries were well defined by 1790 and only one county boundary change was made after 1790. In 1812, Putnam county was taken off the southern part of the county, so you have to be aware that for 1810 and earlier, Dutchess County included the Putnam County towns. There were changes in town lines after 1790, so that the names of the towns in the 1790 or 1820 census, are not the same as the towns and cities listed in the 1930 census.

#### Availability of the census, indexes, extracts and transcriptions 1790-1840

The main source of the census we usually see, in all its forms, is the microfilmed copy that comes from the National Archives in Washington, DC. You can visit the Archives or one of the many regional branches of the National Archives around the United States and view the census microfilm at their facilities for free (hours and addresses are online at <http://www.archives.gov/facilities/index.html>.)

You can buy or rent copies of the microfilm from the National Archives. On line see [http://www.archives.gov/publications/microfilm\\_catalogs/](http://www.archives.gov/publications/microfilm_catalogs/)

[how\\_to\\_rent\\_microfilm.html](#) > or write to them at: National Archives Census Microfilm Rental Program, P. O. Box 30, 9050 Junction Drive, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0030. Actually, many local public libraries are set up to order rental microfilm from the National Archives through their regular interlibrary loan program.

You can rent copies of census microfilm to use at local LDS Family History Centers. Visit the Family History Library Catalog at [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) or your local FHC to determine the microfilm number you need to order (the number is different from the NARA film number).

These arrangements for looking at census had been available for years when a new media appeared. Commercial suppliers scanned the microfilm to create a digital image that was then transferred to CD-ROM that could be purchased and used on your computer at home, giving you various ways to manipulate the images themselves. HeritageQuest, ALL-CENSUS on eBay, and Census View at [www.censusview.org](http://www.censusview.org) are just some of the companies that offer this kind of product (no endorsements implied).

You can now also see digital images of that microfilmed copy online. The 2 online sources offering all of the available censuses for all states from 1790 to 1930 are Ancestry.com and HeritageQuest Online. Ancestry.com offers this resource on a subscription basis for individuals to access from their home computers. However, it can also be accessed free of charge from Internet-capable computers at LDS Family History Centers all over the country (including the FHC in Poughkeepsie where our DCGS library is). HeritageQuest online is offered as a database available only through public libraries that pay for it. Both Ancestry.com and HeritageQuest are now available at any branch of the National Archives.

US GenWeb Census Project <http://www.rootsweb.com/~census/index.htm> is an all-volunteer project with the goal of transcribing census records in a standard format in order to make them available free to genealogical researchers on the Internet. Which counties and states get covered depends, of course, on the volunteers who offer to work on them.

Finally, many local societies have published extracts and/or indexes of various censuses over the years, as DCGS did for the 1810 census, both in book format or through their periodical publications.

#### Using Online Indexes 1790-1840

Having the census so available compared to years past is wonderful in itself. But what makes it even more useful, something that you go back to often to tie up loose ends, follow up old ideas, or go on fishing trips, is the number of indexes you can now find. So, if you haven't been able to find the burial place of a father or mother who probably left Dutchess County to go west with a sibling of your county

ancestor, the census index helps you follow those siblings and test your theory.

Published indexes, that only include the head of household, have been available for some time for almost every state 1790 through 1870 (of course, up to 1840, the head of household is the only name in the census). At every FHC, there is a microfiche copy of indexes to all the censuses 1790-1850. Soundex searches (a type of indexing) have been available on microfilm from the National Archives for the 1880 to 1920 censuses (with some gaps and exceptions). LDS has a free every name index to the 1880 census available online (and a CD-ROM version for sale).

The AIS company which produced most of the early indexes is the basis for the indexes used by Ancestry.com for the 1790-1840 censuses. HeritageQuest is developing their own indexes and for the censuses before 1850, have finished 1790-1820. Although they do not have all of the census years covered, they plan to for the future.

One advantage of the online indexes is that you can make an index search on a small area, down to a township level in some cases; or you can search all of the states for all of the years at one time. You can immediately check on the results of the index search because there is a direct link from the index entry to the census image. You can do many index searches at one sitting, because all of the data is available in one place. And you can vary the search itself, using variations of first and last names, searching for just first names or last names, changing the places.

Don't forget that many of the pitfalls of searching printed indexes also apply to online indexes, especially if they start from the same place.

Depending on how the index was made, you can have different kinds of errors. If you have more than one index available, check them all, because they will have different errors. The indexer may have skipped a name entirely by mistake, copied it incorrectly, misread names on worn and torn pages, with faded smeared or bleeding ink, disintegrating paper, poor handwriting, and unfamiliar abbreviations. Indexers working with microfilmed copy find tightly bound pages, or entries obscured from folded over pages; the microfilmer may have turned 2 pages at a time and so missed some pages; or set improper focus or lighting during microfilming.

Therefore, old-fashioned advice still applies - do not assume that if a name is not in an index that the person is not there; you may still have to search the schedules. Online, this may be expressed as "browsing" the census, rather than "searching" it. For both Ancestry.com and HeritageQuest Online, you can choose to browse the census page by page when the index does not serve your purpose.

Ancestry.com and HeritageQuest do present two very different online images (there is much more contrast between dark and bright in HeritageQuest), and if you are having a

problem reading the page in one version, you may be better able to read it in the other version.

*[to be continued]*

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### • Membership

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Membership listings are a benefit of membership. Updates are published in the written versions of this newsletter which are distributed to all current members

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### • DCGS MEETING, 18 May 2004

*Contr. by Christine Crawford-Oppenheimer*  
(This is an expanded version of a brief summary printed in the previous issue -- *Ed.*)

**Christine Crawford-Oppenheimer spoke on the topic "What Did Your Ancestors Leave You? Probing into Probate."** While an ancestor's estate generally left items only to close relatives and friends, the papers created as a result of settling it may contain wonderful gifts for genealogists researching the family: their ancestors may unknowingly have left them gifts of information.

Probate is the process of administering the estate of a dead person, including taking stock of the person's assets, settling debts, and distributing property to the heirs. Some beginning genealogists think that if an ancestor didn't leave a will, there will be nothing worth looking at in an estate file, but this is not so. Often, if there was no will, there will be more interesting papers in the file than if there wasn't. Papers in an estate file may include some or all of the following: a will; letters of administration; the widow's renunciation of right to administer; an estate inventory; a list of who bought what at the estate sale (called "vendu list" in some areas); a list of the deceased's heirs, including their relationship to the deceased; petitions for guardianship of minor children; other petitions: bills from creditors; a final account of the estate (who got how much money); receipts from anyone who received money from the estate.

Look for estate files for all your ancestors, including women (especially widows) and for all the siblings of your ancestors. Estate files of siblings, especially unmarried men, may include information about relatives that will help you pull families together. Before 1850, estate files may be the only documents you find that pull together names of parents and children. Wills can also be very informative because they are one of the few documents about ancestors that were free-form, rather than fill-in-the-blanks; people writing them could and did say anything.

Estates are normally filed in the county where the deceased person lived, even if he died elsewhere. If the land has been in different counties over the years, look for the estate file in the county that had jurisdiction when the person died. If the person owned land elsewhere, there might be an estate file in that county, also. Use one of the following books to find out

what repository should hold the estate files: *The Handy Book for Genealogists*; *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*; *County Courthouse Book*; *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research*; or *New York State Probate Records: A Genealogist's Guide to Testate and Intestate Records*.

If you visit a courthouse in search of estate files, ask courthouse personnel to show you where and how the documents are filed; filing systems vary from county to county, even within the same state. If you write to a courthouse to ask for documents, give the name of the deceased person and date of death (or potential range of dates if the exact date is not known), give a list of the documents mentioned above, and ask the cost of photocopying them. Then cross your fingers and hope that great-great-grandpa made a bequest to you of interesting information in his estate file.

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#### • Jeannine Minisci

Bob Minisci may have already told you that Lakeland Chapter DAR presented a large scholarship in Jeannine's name this year to a young lady from Lakeland who plans to eventually attend medical school. This was made possible by generous donations in Jeannine's memory from her family and friends. It was during her term as Regent that our DAR Chapter initiated our first scholarship program, so this was a wonderful tribute to Jeannine.

*rcvd 6/27//04 from Gay Harlowe, Jeannine's friend  
and Regent of Lakeland (FL) Chapter DAR*

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#### • Genealogical DNA data base

An article published in Everton's Family History Magazine, May/June 2004 issue, pages 26-28 (Research through DNA?) gives an update on the Molecular Genealogy Research Program (MGRP). The project moved from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, to the Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation (SMGF) ([www.smgf.org](http://www.smgf.org)) in Salt Lake City. The article tells you how to participate in the database and what you can learn from the database.

- Dan Kile

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