

Family History

Census and muster records

What census records are available for Australia?

Prior to 2001 it was Australian federal government policy to destroy all census returns with names on them for privacy reasons. The census substitutes for Australia is electoral rolls. See Research guide – *Electoral rolls*.

Some 19th century census records have survived. These are valuable tools for locating ancestors in colonial Australia. Nick Vine Hall's book *Tracing Your Family History in Australia : A National Guide to Sources* 3rd ed. pp. 138-147 (FAMHIS 929.394 2002) contains detailed information about dates, coverage and location of early Australian census records.

New South Wales census and muster records

General musters

Held annually between 1795 and 1825, they included all the inhabitants of the Colony. Other musters, taken more frequently and at different times, included musters of livestock, musters of convicts or musters taken specifically to include only males, females or children.

The first census of New South Wales

Held in November 1828, it is the only census to survive in full to the present day. Its aim was to record all the inhabitants of the colony at the time, and provides the individual's full name, age, place of residence, ship of arrival, occupation employer's name and place of residence.

State Library of Queensland holds the *1828 Census of NSW* in the family history reference area on level 3 (FAMHIS 929.3 1980) and on CD-ROM (QCFS 929.394 2001).

Other printed musters and censuses held at State Library include:

- *Musters and Lists, NSW and Norfolk Island 1800-1802* (FAMHIS 929.3944 1988)
- *Land musters, Stock Returns and Lists, VDL 1803-1822* (FAMHIS 994.602 1991)
- *Musters of NSW and Norfolk Island 1805-1806* (FAMHIS 929.394 1989)
- *General Musters of NSW, Norfolk Is. and VDL, 1811* (FAMHIS 929.39944 1987)
- *General Muster of NSW, 1814* (FAMHIS 929.39944 1987)
- *General Muster, Land and Stock Muster of NSW, 1822* (FAMHIS 929.3944 1988)
- *General Muster List of NSW 1823, 1824, 1825* (FAMHIS 929.394 1999)
- *General Return of Convicts in NSW, 1837* (FAMHIS 929.3994 1987)

After the 1828 census, the **1841 census** is the most complete of the early census records for the colony. It is held on microfilm at MFL 929.3944 199- (AO/SR reels 2222, 2223, 2508, 2509). There is an *index* to this census at MFL 929.3944 199- (AO/SR reels 1350, 1351, 1352). The index is also online at <https://mhns.w.au/indexes/census-and-musters/census-1841/>.

Note: Some of the above listed musters as well as the 1841 NSW census can be found on ancestryLibrary Edition, available at State Library.

Australian census and muster records

- State Library has a copy of the NSW State Archives & Records guide, *Guide to Muster and Census Records*, at the level 3 desk (MFA 929.393 1986). It is a guide to the musters and census for New South Wales, Norfolk Island and Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania).

- Tasmanian Archives has “Census Records 1837-1857”, available at https://librarianstas.ent.sirsiidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/names. Digitised copies may be available to view and/or print.
- *South Australia 1841 Census* [CD-ROM] / compiled by Graham Jaunay (QCFS 929.39423 2005)
Graham Jaunay’s site <http://www.jaunay.com/auscensus.html> provides a comprehensive list of the 19th century censuses and musters taken in Australia (all States) with details of where the records are held.

What international census records are available?

Census records for the British Isles

State Library holds many British Isles census records on CD-ROM. The following census records on CD-ROM are just a few of those available. Please check our One Search online catalogue at <https://onesearch.slq.qld.gov.au/> for availability:

- *1841 and 1851 Census for Nottinghamshire county* [CD-ROM] (QCFS 929.34252 2003)
- *1851 Census for Devon, Norfolk and Warwick counties* [CD-ROM] (QCFS 929.342 1997)
- *1861 and 1871 Census* for various counties including Cornwall, Dorset, Essex, Gloucestershire, Kent, Lanarkshire, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Surrey & Sussex [CD-ROM]

Census and substitutes for Ireland

- *The 1901 Irish census index* for Fermanagh and Tyrone [microfiche] (MFCB 929.3415 1994)
- *Griffiths valuation 1848-1864* [microfiche] (MFCB 929.3415 1978) and the *Tithe applotment books c1823-38* [microfilm] (MFL 929.3 1990) are two valuable land records that substitute for destroyed censuses covering all Ireland. *Tithe Applotment Books* are also available through ancestryLibrary edition.
- *Irish Flax Growers*, available through ancestryLibrary edition, lists the 60,000 individuals growing flax for the Irish Linen Board in 1796.

Check the chapter on census records in John Grenham’s *Tracing your Irish ancestors* (FAMHIS 929.1072 2006) for further information.

Are any international census records on the Internet?

- **FindMyPast** – available *onsite* at State Library
 - British census records for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, and 1921.
 - 1939 Register, which was taken at the outbreak of war and contains the details of 41 million people in England and Wales.
- **ancestryLibrary edition** – available *onsite* at State Library
 - British census records for 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911 and 1921.
 - 1939 England & Wales register
 - United States 1790-1940, Canada 1851-1911 plus miscellaneous records for other countries
- **FreeCEN : UK Census Online** at <http://www.freecen.org.uk/>. Part of a project that aims to provide an accessible online searchable database of 19th century UK census returns. It is not complete and is continually being added to.
- **Census of Ireland 1901 & 1911 plus 19th century census collections**, available at <https://nationalarchives.ie/collections/search-the-census/>. Provides records for Ireland. Covers all 32 counties. Search by name, county or street. View digitised originals. Access is free.
- **My Free Census**, <https://www.myfreecensus.com/>, is a directory of free online census records. New records are added on a regular basis.

Need further information?

(07) 3840 7810 | slq.qld.gov.au/ask

© State Library of Queensland, 2025. Last updated July 2026



This guide is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY-4.0) licence. You are free to copy, communicate and adapt this work, so long as you attribute State Library of Queensland. For more information see creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/