



# DETOUR TO YOUR ROOTS

Have missing records stymied your genealogical search?  
Follow our routes around three common research  
roadblocks to find the family information you need.

BY LISA A. ALZO

**MANY A FAMILY** historian has thrown up her hands in frustration after learning the records she needs simply aren't available due to acts of nature, unforeseen disasters or bad administrative decisions. Three of the most common roadblocks: the 1890 US census; lists of departing passengers from the popular port of Bremen, Germany; and 20th-century military service records.

Have these missing records hampered your genealogy search? We'll summarize the sad tales of these documents' demises and suggest detours you can take to arrive at the information you need.



## Roadblock: 1890 US census

Most of the 1890 US census was lost following a fire at the US Department of Commerce building in 1921. It wasn't the fire but the efforts to put it out that did in the records. Unfortunately for genealogists, that 1890 enumeration could've provided clues to missing links in many families, especially new immigrants during the late-19th-century boom in overseas arrivals. But this census' fate doesn't have to dampen your research progress if you employ these tips:

■ **CHECK THE FRAGMENTS.** Some genealogists don't realize that fragments of the 1890 population schedules survived. They list more than 6,000 people from Alabama, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Ohio, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota and Texas. Find them at subscription site Ancestry.com <[ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com)> and HeritageQuest Online <[heritagequestonline.com](http://heritagequestonline.com)> (free through subscribing libraries). You also can use census microfilm at National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) research facilities, the Family History Library (FHL) <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)> and its FamilySearch Centers, as well as many libraries and archives (for example, the Georgia State Archives has copies of records for Georgia). NARA has a list of 1890 census microfilms at <[archives.gov/publications/microfilm-catalogs/census/1790-1890/part-08.html](http://archives.gov/publications/microfilm-catalogs/census/1790-1890/part-08.html)>.

■ **ENLIST VETERANS RECORDS.** The 1890 census included a special enumeration of Union Civil War veterans and their widows, a substantial number of which survived the fire. Veterans census schedules for half of Kentucky and states following alphabetically survived. They're available on Ancestry.com and on microfilm through many of the repositories mentioned above. As a bonus, you'll find that many

enumerators also recorded Confederate veterans' names. In some cases, those names are crossed out, but still legible.

■ **RELY ON RECONSTRUCTIONS.** Some intrepid researchers have attempted to reconstruct 1890 census data using documents such as tax records and city directories. For information about several of these projects, see <[familytreemagazine.com/article/reconstructing-the-1890-census](http://familytreemagazine.com/article/reconstructing-the-1890-census)>. To find others, search Google for the county and state plus "1890 census" or check Cyndi's List <[cyndislist.com/census.htm#1890](http://cyndislist.com/census.htm#1890)>. Ancestry.com has several 1890 census substitutes, too.

If no reconstruction projects exist for your ancestral locality, search for city directories, tax lists, voter registries and other records created around 1890. Chicago voter records from the years 1888, 1890 and 1892, for example, are available on FHL microfilm and Ancestry.com.

■ **COUNT ON STATE CENSUSES.** Some states and territories took censuses between 1880 and 1900; use Ann S. Lainhart's *State Census Records* (Genealogical Publishing Co.) to identify them. Ancestry.com has some state censuses. Also search for microfilm in the FHL catalog and the state archives or historical society.

■ **GO BEYOND THE CENSUS.** Look for alternative sources such as vital records, WWI draft registrations and, for people who died after 1962, the Social Security Death Index (SSDI) at <[stevemorse.org/ssdi](http://stevemorse.org/ssdi)> (you can order copies of the SS-5 application form from the Social Security Administration).



### Roadblock: Bremen passenger lists

Millions of emigrants from northern and eastern Europe started the journey to the United States at the port of Bremen (also known as Bremerhaven).

The city kept departure lists from 1832 into the 1900s, but in 1875, record-keepers authorized the destruction of old lists to make file space available. Lists were destroyed each year until about 1909, when only the two most recent years' records were spared. Many subsequent documents were destroyed in WWII bombings. If you believe your kin set sail from Bremen, follow these routes to record substitutes:

■ **GO ONLINE.** Only 3,017 of the original lists, dating from 1920 to 1939, have survived, as have copies of lists from 1907 to 1908 and 1913 to 1914 (they'd been sent away for statistical evaluation). The Bremen Society for Genealogical

Investigation (*Die Maus*) has transcribed these lists; you can search them at <[www.passengerlists.de](http://www.passengerlists.de)>. The website has other useful information, too, including ship names, departure dates, destinations, hometowns and group photos.

■ **CONSULT SECONDARY SOURCES.** *German Immigrants: Lists of Passengers Bound from Bremen to New York* by Gary J. Zimmerman and Marion Wolfert (Genealogical Publishing Co.) includes many names of passengers from 1847 to 1871 taken from other sources. Also consult *From Bremen to America in 1850: Fourteen Emigrant Ship Lists* by Clifford N. Smith (Genealogical Publishing Co.), which contains 1840s and 1850s Bremen passenger listings gleaned from articles in the emigration newspaper *Allgemeine Auswanderungs-Zeitung*. You can usually find these references in major genealogical libraries.

■ **SEE WHAT'S IN STATE ARCHIVES.** Resources at the Bremen State Archives <[staatsarchiv.bremen.de](http://staatsarchiv.bremen.de)> include:

1. passenger lists naming individuals who were involved in court cases
2. crew lists and shipboard birth and death records of Bremen's *Seemannsammt* (board of shipping)
3. *Entlassungen von Bewohnern des Landgebiets aus dem bremischen Staatsverband wegen Auswanderung*, or the 1854-to-1906 records granting residents permission to emigrate, which include the names of many individuals who lived and worked in Bremen prior to departure for America.

The archives' website is in German, but you can translate it by pasting the URL into Google's website translator <[google.com/language\\_tools](http://google.com/language_tools)>, then click the Use link on the left for researcher information. Unless you have specific details about the record you need (person's name, the date, etc.), your best bet is to hire a local researcher. You can find one using the Association for Professional Genealogists directory <[www.apgen.org/directory](http://www.apgen.org/directory)>.



### Roadblock: WWI and later service records

A 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis destroyed 16 to 18 million military personnel files. The burned records include those of 80 percent of the Army personnel discharged from Nov. 1, 1912, to Jan. 1, 1960, and 75 percent of Air Force personnel

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discharged from Sept. 25, 1947, to Jan. 1, 1964. No microfilm copies or indexes of the documents had been made. Before you raise the white flag, try these workarounds for documenting 20th-century military ancestors:

■ **REQUEST SURVIVING RECORDS.** Records of airmen with names occurring alphabetically before *Hubbard, James E.*, escaped the blaze. You can request surviving records from the NPRC using Standard Form 180 <[archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/standard-form-180.html](http://archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/standard-form-180.html)>. WWI discharge papers also survived the 1973 fire.

Many veterans filed copies of their discharge papers with their local county courthouse. Look for court records on FHL microfilm, or check with the court website or contact the clerk for instructions on requesting copies.

■ **TRY ALTERNATE SOURCES.** NARA has 19 million final pay vouchers providing the veteran's name, service number, dates of service and character of service. See <[archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/alternate-record-sources.html](http://archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/alternate-record-sources.html)> for information on these and other alternate information sources for the burned records.

Depending on the war in which your ancestor served, you may be able to find information on him in military records databases on NARA's website, Ancestry.com or Footnote. NARA's Access to Archival Databases <[aad.archives.gov/aad](http://aad.archives.gov/aad)>,

for example, has a database of Army enlistments for World War II, as well as WWII and Korea prisoners of war.

Men born between Sept. 11, 1872, and Sept. 12, 1900, had to register for the WWI draft. Draft registration cards are searchable on Ancestry.com and available on NARA microfilm M1509 and at the FHL. To use the film, you'll need to know the man's residence at the time of registration—for larger cities, this means identifying a particular draft board. Use city directories and a draft board map (find one on FHL microfilm 1498803) to find your ancestor.

■ **SEARCH FOR BURIAL CASE FILES.** If your ancestor died while in the military from 1915 to 1939, you can check little-known documents called burial case files. The files were maintained for war casualties and for domestic military deaths, and are contained in Record Group 92 <[archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/092.html](http://archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/092.html)> at NARA in Washington, DC. Get them by sending a written request to NARA; see <[archives.gov/research/order](http://archives.gov/research/order)> for details.

Research roadblocks happen to the best of us. After you throw up your hands in frustration, take these genealogical detours. Your brick walls just might dissolve in front of you. ■

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**LISA A. ALZO** helps you find your ancestors' friends and family on page 54.

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