

Finding Family – April 2018

Finding Napa History in US Census Data

By Joan Harris

As I walked by the majestic two-story stone building on First Street between Coombs and Randolph last week, I looked up at the entry to read, “Goodman Library”. I looked down at the carved cornerstone and saw the year “1901”. Who was this “Goodman?” Did this Goodman live in Napa a hundred and some years ago? Perhaps the US Census could provide some answers.

The US Census records provide an amazing storehouse of information for genealogists and other researchers. Every ten years since the first census began in 1790, census takers have listed everyone living in the US on a particular day. So let's see what the Census can tell us about “Goodman”.

To look up someone in the census records, you need to have a name, a place, and a year. I find Goodman's first name, George, by looking at an internet Wikipedia article. I have the place, Napa. The library cornerstone gives me the year of 1901. The nearest census for 1901 is 1900. So now I am looking for a George Goodman living in Napa, California in the 1900 US census.

I start from the free Family Search home page <https://www.familysearch.org>. After selecting the “Search” item and then “Records” from the menu bars, I enter “George” and “Goodman”. I select Residence and enter Napa, CA. I enter 1900 as the residence year, to bring up the 1900 census. I also restrict records to the category, “census”. When the search results appear, I find not just one George Goodman, but two George Goodmans.

It's likely that one George is related to the other. Let's first look at the census data for “George Goodman Sr.”. The 1900 census lists Goodman Sr. as a 77-year-old banker, born July, 1823 in New York. Also living at his 60 Grant Avenue St. residence were Mr. Goodman's wife and two servants.

The second George Goodman was born in June, 1868, making him 32 years old at the time of the census. He was born in California and was living at 501 Randolph St. in Napa. The census tells us that his father was born in New York. That makes the George Goodman Sr., who we also know was born in New York, very likely his father. The other clue that the two Georges are related comes from the similarity of their work. George Goodman's occupation is listed as bank teller. I'm thinking it likely that George Goodman, Sr., the banker, found the teller job for his son at his bank.

We can obtain more information about the Goodman family by looking at the next earliest US Census, which is 1880. There are no 1890 census records, as they were destroyed in a fire. Going back 20 years we find two George Goodmans at a Grant Avenue residence in Napa. The older Goodman is 56 and a banker. The younger George Goodman is 12 and is listed as “son”.

One can find even more information in the census records. Other family members, the family's servants, and even neighbors are listed. After registering at Family Search, you can do the same search as described here and find out even more about the Napa of 1900.

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My advice in doing all genealogical research is to get yourself organized. Gather the information that you have, ask a question that can be answered, and don't forget to record the answer before you forget what your question was.

I hope this example of using the US census data will inspire you to do some research of your own.