The California History Room has the federal census schedules on microfilm for the years 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930, for California only.

1850, 1860, 1870
These census years have print indexes, which are located in the Reference Collection. The 1850 census has two indexes, one by county and one statewide.

To use the print indexes:
1. Look up the surname, and locate the proper person by first name and age.
2. Write down the county and all of the numbers given, along with what each number represents (page, enumeration district, etc.), or photocopy the page.
3. At the Information Desk, request the census reel for the county and enumeration district given in the index.
4. Search the reel for the enumeration district, page, and any other numbers from the index.

We also have electronic indexes for California and other western states for both the 1850 and 1860 censuses.

Note: The 1850 census lacks the counties of Contra Costa, San Francisco, and Santa Clara.

1880, 1900, 1910, 1920
These census years have Soundex indexes.

The Soundex is a coded surname (last name) index based on the way a surname sounds rather than the way it is spelled. Surnames that sound the same, but are spelled differently, like SMITH and SMYTH, have the same code and are filed together. Every Soundex code consists of a letter and three numbers, such as W-123 (Webster). The letter is always the first letter of the surname.

To use the Soundex indexes:
1. In the Soundex Reference Guide (located on the top of the Reference shelves), find the Soundex code for the surname. Write it down.
2. At the Information Desk, request the Soundex reel that contains the code you want.
3. Locate the code on the reel. Within the code, names are arranged by first name. (Ignore the surnames.) Locate the proper person by first name and age.
4. Write down the county and all of the numbers given, along with what each number represents (page, enumeration district, etc.), or print a copy of the card. Refer to the example on the other side of this sheet.
5. At the Information Desk, request the census reel for the county and enumeration district given in the index.
6. Search the reel for the enumeration district, page, and any other key numbers from the index.

(over)
Example of a Soundex card from the 1900 census

The 1880 and 1920 Soundex cards are very similar to this, but they give ages instead of birth months and years.

The 1910 census has a Miracode index, which looks different from the Soundex but is used exactly the same way.

The 1880 Soundex includes only families with children 10 years of age and under. If your family does not fall into this category, try using the index to the of 1880 census transcription which we have on CD-ROM. (This index is also available online at www.familysearch.org.)

1890
The 1890 census was destroyed in a fire. The California 1890 great register of voters index helps to fill the gap. The 3-volume index is located in the Reference Collection, call number JK8791 C244 2001. However, since women could not vote in 1890, the index lists men only.

1930
California is not one of the states that have Soundex for the 1930 census. However, the California History Room has a tip sheet to walk you through the process, as well as several tools to assist with the search:

- Our rich collection of city directories and telephone directories can provide ancestor addresses.
- Our historical map collection can provide cross-street information.
- Web sites that help identify enumeration districts are bookmarked on our Internet access computers.
- Enumeration district maps and enumeration district descriptions are available on microfilm.

Non-population Schedules—1850, 1860, 1870, 1880
Also known as partial or special schedules, these provide details on agriculture, manufacturing, products of industry, social statistics, and mortality. They are can be found on Microfilm 130 (1850-1860), 132 (1870), 133 (1880). Request these at the Information Desk.