

THE SCGS INDEX OF  
THE CALIFORNIA 1852 CENSUS MICROFILM  
AND  
THE 1935 DAR TRANSCRIPTION

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## ***DEDICATION***

This cross-index of the remaining documents of the 1852 Census of California is respectfully dedicated to the memory of long-time member and active supporter, Karen Buss who passed away on 8 October 1998. Sadly, it was just two months before the completion of this eight-year effort.

Karen was the most active worker on the project from the day of its inception to the day of her passing. Many other members of the Southern California Genealogical Society worked along side her and contributed much to this index, but none gave as tirelessly as she did. In addition to this task, she also found time to index numerous books for both this society and the New England Historical and Genealogical Society.

She was the heart and soul of this project and inspired the rest of us. She will be missed by all the members of the society.

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### Background

The 1852 census of California was the first one taken in the state. California joined the US in 1850, just missing the great census of that year, so this special census was done to determine the number of representatives the state would be allotted in the Congress. Thus it was vital to enumerate as many citizens as possible to gain a large congressional delegation.

The results of this census only exist on six rolls of microfilm; the original sheets were destroyed immediately after filming. Unfortunately these six rolls are of very poor quality. Some of the problems stem from the decayed condition of the originals by 1972, and some obviously from the filming itself.

To get as much of a picture as possible today, one must refer to these films (which never before have been indexed,) and a transcription of the original census document made in the mid-1930s under the auspices of the DAR. As you will discover, that transcription has a set of problems itself.

Thus the purpose of this index is to recover as many names as possible from both sources in a cross-indexed fashion. Ideally one would prefer primary data from the census film itself, but much of it that was obviously visible on the print copy to the transcribers in 1935 is illegible today on the microfilm.

The horrors and abominations of both documents are described below. Hopefully they would not be considered an abstraction but will educate the user of this index on how to approach the entries.

### History of the census

The census was taken in 1852 on forms very similar to the recent 1850 census. They were done by county, with the enumerator's name, and were to gather the following information in the fields listed thus:

1. Names of Persons of every Description
2. Age
3. Sex
4. Color (White, Black, or Mulatto)
5. Profession, trade or occupation
6. Place of Birth, naming State or Country
7. Last residence
8. Number of White inhabitants - Male
9. Number of White inhabitants - Female
10. No. of citizens of the U.S. over 21 years
11. No. of Negroes - Male
12. No. of Negroes - Female
13. No. of Negroes - over 21 years old
14. No. of Mulattoes - Male
15. No. of Mulattoes - Female
16. No. of Mulattoes - Over 21 years old
17. No. of Domesticated Indians - Male
18. No. of Domesticated Indians - Female
19. No. of Domesticated Indians Over 21 Years old
20. No. of Foreign Residents - Male
21. No. of Foreign Residents - Female
22. No. of Foreign Residents Over 21 years old.

Here the first big problem of the census was implanted. No one had taken the ethnic mix of California into account. And worse, the instructions for each of these fields were vague. Therefore nothing from fields 10

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and higher can be taken as meaningful. Indeed, fields 8 and 9 have to be evaluated in each case. One enumerator listed "John Chinaman" on fifteen consecutive lines, and on each marked the person as "Male," "White." He did, however, discriminate between them by listing ages and occupations.

As far as is known, the census was never published, but languished in the California Archives. In the early 1930s, someone conceived of a WPA project to transcribe the original census to an exact typed and indexed (by county) publication for general distribution to libraries and such. The DAR was put in charge of this and WPA workers were assigned to them. The specifications for their document included that the number of record lines on each page (45) match the number on the census, and the page numbers also match so that really this would be a transcription of the main fields. But this never happened. First, the supervision seems mainly to be limited to passing out single sheets of the 1852 census to individual WPA workers, one sheet at a time. When it was finished, the worker returned it and got another sheet. No attempt was made to match the order of these DAR pages to the order of the census. And, since the DAR did not usually transcribe the totals for grouped entries on a single line of the census (see details below,) but only those of individual people, and filled every transcribed page, the page numbers could never match. To finally muddy the waters, the published version was typed from the handwritten transcriptions of the WPA workers. Here, when the 45-line input page was done, complete with a recapitulation of some of the sex, color, and citizenship data at the bottom, the typist continued on the same sheet with the start of next 45-line form. Thus the number of pages in the DAR work is far less than the number of census pages, and there is no fixed relationship to the actual census page numbers.

Also, the DAR only selected certain fields of each record to transcribe, namely:

County  
Enumerator  
Name  
Age  
Sex (and race)  
Occupation  
Birthplace  
Res.

The "Res" corresponds to Item 7 of the census, the last residence before coming to California. This was not universally understood in 1852, for many people listed "California" as their "Res" answer to this question.

By 1972 it was noticed that the original sheets of the census had further decayed and were vermin infested. Now the Genealogical Society of Utah was brought in to film them. The story is (and perhaps apocryphal) that the man feeding sheets to the camera refused to do his work until he was provided with a good brush and rubber gloves. The paper census was then destroyed.

### Numbers reported and what it looked like

In 1852, the report of the census to Washington stated that 244,593 persons were enumerated. The legislative document transferring it to Congress admitted that it was "imperfectly accomplished...owing to the mixed, unsettled and fluctuating character of the population, the difficulties of thoroughly exploring the mountain counties,...hostile tribes of Indians,...and to the mistaken supposition of many that the census was in some way connected with taxation." It concludes that not more than five-sixths of the whole population was recorded.

The number is interesting, for the actual census document does not cover nearly that many names. Luckily for the California politicians, the document itself did not go to Washington. Every enumerator used lines such as "20 Mexicans down the hollow," "9 Coppers" (i.e. Indians,) or "Approximately 50 people down the creek, some of them white with some women." As noted above, they had numerous "John Chinaman," "Sam

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Singsong," and "15 Chinese" references grouped on a single line. A rough count of these grouped entries still readable indicates that they constitute about 10% of the reported 244,593. Then too there are numerous "Mr. Jones" then a few lines labeled "wife," "son," etc.; a clear indication that the enumerator did not talk to them personally.

Then too there were other peculiarities in the count. The enumerators for Colusi (modern Colusa) and Marin counties reported that they did not receive the official forms. Hence they only turned in totals, with some statistical breakdown of their work; this accounts for 1,656 persons in the total. These counties are listed as "Stats" in the DAR list. Also listed as "Stats" in the DAR transcription are the names in the census for Butte Co. The census documents did not survive intact into the 1930s. Rats chewed off the first several inches of the forms from the left side. We can tell age, sex, occupation, etc. from the census, but no names. Counting the lines, there are 8572 persons reported, but that number and the statistical analysis is all that is left.

It is impossible to reconstruct the total that was sent to Washington. Even the sum of all the reporting counties does not exactly match it. No one has ever reported the number of names the DAR extracted, and much of the microfilmed census document can no longer be read.

And this census had the usual census problems. Although the enumerator was directed to ask if the family had been counted before, the results were the same as in other such censuses. One easily distinguishable family was enumerated three times in San Francisco.

Between the two sources, we were able to extract 170,721 records detailing each separate persons. Alas, many of them are the "Mr.," "Mrs.," and "son" variety. Most of that number have both a census and DAR cross-reference, but many are only found in one source or another. We did not list the lines on which a number of persons were grouped, for there was no genealogical value in them.

### What we did and how to interpret this database

The DAR published their document in thirteen separate volumes, each given a Roman numeral and called an "Index." As shown in the accompanying illustration (starting on page vii), the counties are listed alphabetically, and grouped so there are about 12,000 names or so in each volume. Also, the population California reported to Washington for each county is listed. The volumes are indexed at the end of each, with only references to the page numbers, not the counties the person was in. However, with the illustration provided here, you can see which page numbers relate to which counties. Also in this illustration the last field gives the total number of names we were able to find and extract from both the DAR document and the 1852 census microfilm combined.

This project started by copying out every citation in the DAR record. This list was sorted alphabetically by county and compared to the census microfilm. When we found a match, the film number (1-6) and the page number of the census was noted on the record. When we found other names in the census, we added them to the data base with the correct country, but noting DAR location as "0." Conversely, if we had an entry in the DAR document but could not find it in the census, we put "0" for the page number there, but added the number of the microfilm roll on which it would have occurred. For counties broken between two rolls of microfilm, both numbers are listed with a "?." An illustration of all these forms of less than perfect records you will encounter in the database can be found starting on page 1. We should not dissuade you from looking at the microfilm for a specific name, even if we did not find it. Probably a dedicated researcher, looking for a specific name, and using a superb microfilm machine can recover some of these lost names.

At this time we discovered some huge problems with the DAR document. Each extractor used his own judgement about what to extract. Some never did any Chinese, some didn't do wives that lived with their husband, etc. and all of them missed many perfectly readable names. In one case, a series of 1499 names in San Francisco were not extracted; we indicate that they are not in any of the three San Francisco divisions the DAR established. So the problem is compounded. The original enumerators varied as to who they would

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list by name, and who by group. Then the DAR-WPA transcribers individually decided what they would extract.

Then there is the handwriting of the census problem. Almost amazingly it is very good on most census sheets. The information was gathered on work sheets, then transcribed to the census document. The problem came from the style of 1852 writing compared with the writing the WPA transcribers were familiar with. They misread many names, primarily the initial capital letter. Hence we had many, many names in the DAR document that we could not find in the appropriate sequence of names in the census document. However, by properly reading the first letter of the name in the census, we could see quite clearly the mistake of the extractor. Initially, we thought of cross-indexing these mistakes, but...there were so many, and since the people misspelled in the DAR document never existed, we dropped the idea and just corrected our database. If you use this database to look up a name in the DAR report, and it isn't there, use some ingenuity in the initial letter (and subsequent spelling) to identify which DAR record it is. All these corrected records can be easily found in the census film. Conversely, if we found a record in the DAR document that had a very unlikely spelling, and we could not locate in on the actual census, no matter how strange it was, we left it as the DAR transcribed it.

Many of the people enumerated are listed only by their last name, and others fall into that category when the census paper deteriorated. To compensate for this, it appears the WPA workers used the "sex" field and appended "(Mr.)," "(Mrs.)," etc. to their transcription. The parentheses seems to be the clue as to whether appellation was given by the enumerator or the WPA. In such a case, one inventive soul seems to have used "(Mad)" for women with seemingly French names; or, perhaps this was a comment on her state of mind. He did not use "(Mon)" for their associated partners.

Another problem with the DAR document is that all names in it are not in their index, plus, many names in the index cannot be found in their tabulation. Especially, several names in the index have no associated page number, and we could never find them in the DAR tabulation or the original census document. The only real value of the DAR index is to find names they could see on the census, that are no longer visible on the surviving microfilm. We have captured all those names in this index, however you must use the DAR index to see the age, sex, race, occupation, birthplace and residence of those people.

### How to locate the area where your ancestor was enumerated

Don't just think of the boundaries of today's counties with the same names. In 1852, California had only been a state for two years, and the counties were much larger than they are today, and the boundaries were quite fluid. Indeed, several of the counties listed in the census did not exist with a political structure. They were only authorized by the legislature, pursuant to a subsequent survey and establishment of a county government. But enumerators were appointed for these shadow counties, and they were given the best information possible on the borders. Apparently it was thought that Washington ought to see that there was a complete and detailed governmental network. In the film of the census they even list San Bernardino County which was not even authorized by the legislature until 1853. No names were included though; the data given for it is only a 1853 summary of the agricultural survey.

Illustrated at the end of this document are two California county boundary maps (pages xiii and xv) that will help you your search, one of 1852 and the second of today (last border adjustment was made in 1944.) They are presented here courtesy of the copyright holder, "The Gold Bug," PO Box 588, Alamo, CA. Their software, AniMap©, runs on any PC and produces similar maps of every county boundary change in every state. For more information about their software, contact them at their web site, <http://www.goldbug.com>.

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### Where to find the documents

This is clearly a problem. We know of no circulating copies of any of the documents, thus you must go to a library to see them.

The Southern California Genealogical Society has a 6-roll set of the entire 1852 census document, that may be viewed at their library in Burbank, CA. The library is open to the public; be sure to call for current hours before coming. The contents of each roll, and associated page numbers are given in a table in this document. The census was filmed in 1972 by the Genealogical Society of Utah.

The actual DAR documents are very rare, for only a few were published. A set is in the Bancroft Library (which through their courtesy we used for the original input.)

Luckily, the DAR transcription was microfilmed on three rolls complete with the their indices. The SCGS has a copy of these done by Bay Microfilms, Palo Alto, CA. They are of good quality and easy to read, but still difficult to use. They were filmed from the thirteen-volume transcription that the DAR published, and the thirteen indices are at the end of each of the thirteen volumes. Since the text they referred to was obvious in the printed copy, they were not identified specifically as which index they were. Thus when the volumes were microfilmed, contiguously on three rolls of film, it can be a tricky proposition to find them, and be sure which DAR volume they cover, or the names of the counties. They are just listed as "Index" at the end of the pages for each of the thirteen sections. There is an index to the three-roll set given here on page xi. A copy of these films is at the Los Angeles Public Library (5th & Hope) under the call no. Microfilm G-176.

More common in California libraries are a three volume set of just the indices to the DAR document. A set is in the Los Angeles Public Library (5th & Hope) under the call number Gen 979.4 D2377-2

### And finally

This cross index was produced by members of the Southern California Genealogical Society over the past eight years. There were many workers, some doing a great deal, others less. The only name here is that of Karen Buss to whom we have dedicated this publication. She worked on the project from its inception until she passed away, unfortunately just two months before its completion. She did the transcription of one DAR volume, fixed the problems in others, and then transcribed all the extracted 1852 census page numbers to this list. When some people fell away from the long and boring task, she picked up their records and completed that work.

She did not do the data entry work blindly. As she saw problems, to the best of her ability she rechecked them and corrected them. Or, if necessary, she alerted the person who turned in the work to recheck the problem. Thank you Karen.

Also, though we have noted many of the indignities done to the original census and the DAR transcription, in no way are we saying that the work we did was perfect. Are there errors in this index? You bet there are, but hopefully it will be a valuable tool to finding out who was in California in 1852.

J A McKenzie  
Burbank, California  
December 1998

Although the names of all the people who actually worked on the index are not included, I would like to acknowledge those who coordinated this project. Jean Nepsund, who began it, Rod Nordberg, who continued it, and J A McKenzie, who brought it to completion.

Al Lewis, President  
Southern California Genealogical Society