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Thanks again,

Sharon Hall
Editor, Publisher, Researcher, Writer and Graphic Designer
Digging History Magazine



Up in Smoke: 1890 and Genealogy's "Black Hole" (or is it?)

by Sharon Hall

Put on your thinking caps. What event which took place ninety-nine years ago has since become an ever-present challenging obstacle to genealogists? On January 10, 1921 most of the 1890 census went up in smoke – “most” being the operative word. A March 1896 fire had already destroyed a number of these records.

Since 1850 census records had provided increasingly more information about our ancestors. The 1880 census was the first to give us a clearer picture of who our ancestors were and how they lived: names and ages of everyone in the household, including servants; how each person was related to the head of household; birthplace of parents and the language spoken; if applicable, immigration year; could they read or writ?; had they attended school in the past year; did the head of household own or rent the home?

All this and more, including information about whether anyone in the household was sick or disabled (blind, deaf, dumb, insane, idiot, crippled, bedridden or maim). For a genealogist this information is a near gold mine!

In 1890 even more information would be gleaned. In addition to the 1880 questions, enumerators were required to record each person's Christian name, including full name and middle initial and surname (who hasn't been frustrated with censuses listing “J.W. Hughes” versus “John W. Hughes” or “M.J. Hughes” versus “Mary J.” Or “Mary Jane Hughes”, hmm?).

Other vital information recorded that year: For a woman, how many children were you the mother of and how many of those were still living; Was the person naturalized or if not had naturalization papers been filed as of yet; Number of months unemployed in the preceding year; How many months did the person attend school in the past year; Does person speak English? If not, what language?

Expanded inquiries as to race were included. For instance, Asian races were differentiated as Chinese, Japanese and so on. Those of mixed heritage might have been noted as mulatto, quadroon or octoroon. Besides questions regarding sickness and disability addressed in the 1880 census, each person was asked whether they suffered from a chronic disease. If so, what was the disease?

Was the person a prisoner, convict, homeless child or pauper?; An answer in the affirmative to the two items immediately above required a separate schedule as well; Was the person a soldier, sailor or marine during the Civil War or were you the widow of a veteran? A special schedule, often referred to as the “1890 Veterans Census”, was used for veterans or widows.

It is truly tragic that most of this vital information went up in smoke in January 1921. Perhaps equally tragic – following the March 1896 fire which badly damaged the 1890 special schedules – was the Department of the Interior's decision to completely destroy those damaged records.

Who knows now, given modern technology, how many of those might have been salvageable, even if only fragmentary.

The Fires

I mentioned the 1890 special schedules which included extended information regarding disabilities, special classes (deaf, blind, insane and so on), crime, mortality and poverty. In March of 1896 a fire damaged these original special schedules before publication of the general statistics volumes. Also partially damaged were transportation and insurance records, later destroyed by order of the Department of Interior.

In 1903 a clerk found the remaining general population schedules and records intact, having suffered no damage in the 1896 fire apparently. Meanwhile, the Secretary of Commerce had been begging for an archives building to safely store census records. Instead, the records continued to be stored in an unlocked room, neatly piled on pine(!) shelving, in the basement of the Commerce Building.

On January 10, 1921, around five o'clock in the afternoon, building fireman James Foster noticed smoke emanating from openings around the pipes running from the boiler room to the file room. Although Foster didn't see any flames, he reported the incident to the desk watchman, who immediately notified the fire department.

Meanwhile, another watchman on the fifth floor noticed smoke in the men's bathroom. He took an elevator down to the basement to investigate only to find dense smoke which forced him back upstairs. By then the fire department had arrived and the fire alarms were pulled, alerting employees on upper floors to evacuate. This was around 5:30.

The dense smoke hindered firefighter efforts but eventually reached the basement.

Thousands were watching as firemen sprayed twenty streams of water into the building, the water seeping down into the basement through holes in the concrete flooring, this despite the fact the fire never left the basement.

By 9:45 p.m. the fire had been extinguished, although water continued to be poured into the basement for another forty-five minutes. The chief clerk opened the windows to let out the smoke and everyone except the watchmen departed the premises.

The next morning officials found records covered by ankle-deep water. The 1890 records had been stacked outside a supposedly fire and water-proof vault where earlier census records were housed (some of those, however, were also damaged).

It was determined by Census Director Sam Rogers that the 1890 records had suffered the most damage, twenty-five percent completely destroyed and fifty percent partially damaged by fire, water and smoke. Some records might be salvaged but it would take two to three years to copy and save them, estimated Director Rogers.

Rogers, quoted in the *Washington Post*, declared the 1890 records "certain to be absolutely ruined. There is no method of restoring the legibility of a water-soaked volume."¹ Salvage efforts couldn't begin either until the insurance companies had thoroughly investigated and documented the losses.

A state-by-state report indicated portions of the 1830, 1840, 1880, 1900 and 1910 censuses had also been damaged by water. Of the 8,919 volumes damaged, 7,957 were from the 1910 census alone. Ten percent of these volumes would have to be opened, dried and recopied. The 1790-1820 and 1850-1870 census, however, had been housed on the fifth floor and undamaged.

The 1920 census, except for some non-population schedules housed on the fourth floor, were temporarily located in a separate building at Sixth and B Streets.

Before the fire, late in 1920 and early January, newspapers were buzzing with reports of data collected during the 1920 census with headlines like these:

AMERICA LEADS IN BACHELORS

Ten Million Eveless Adams Are Running Wild in United States, Census Shows

WESTERN STATES LEAD

“The world’s largest single collection of bachelors” is what the United Press called an upcoming census bureau report which would reveal almost 10 million bachelors over twenty years of age. Western states and cities “harbor most of the bachelors”.

Female prospects for finding a husband varied depending on location and demographics. For instance, Gary, Indiana had “135 males for each 100 females” while Troy, New York had 100 females for every 84 males.²

FARMERS MOVING INTO CITIES, LAST CENSUS SHOWS

Over Half of People in U.S. Live in Urban Territory

RESULT OF WAR

Rural Drift to Town Generally Attributed to World Conflict

For the first time in America’s history more than half the nation’s population had “drifted” to urban territory.³ Headlines through the 1910s back up this claim. In 1911 census statistics clearly refuted the “back to soil” idea.⁴

Farming had taken a considerable hit following World War I. Leading up to

America’s entry and during the war, profits soared. One government explained: “Much loose thinking and many wrong conclusions are based on false impressions concerning the profitableness of farming. The increase in farm profits during the war was inevitably transitory.”⁵ Once the war was over commodity prices plummeted. In a nutshell, many concluded there was “no money in agriculture”.⁶

Number crunchers were checking and re-checking data. Boston took umbrage at their totals, claiming the city’s population was 801,679 versus the census count of 747,923. A re-canvas was demanded, citing frigid weather which had made it difficult for census takers to get around. Interestingly, also cited was “a panicky feeling among foreign-born people over the search for radicals”, causing them to withhold information.⁷

No one was anticipating a fire, of course, but when word first began to spread some newspapers over-reacted a bit, declaring erroneously that every single record dating back to 1790 had been damaged or destroyed. Now THAT would have been a disaster of apocalyptic proportions in regards to documenting the nation’s history.

Newspaper editors were wondering why, with all the money spent on public buildings in Washington, there were no fire-proof vaults to house vital census records. The finger-pointing had only just begun.

\$2,000,000 CIGARETTE

“BUTTS” IN CENSUS BUREAU RECORDS CAUSES FIRE.

DESTROYS MANY RECORDS

Will Require From Two to Three Years to Copy Damaged Records of Many Enumerations.

Senator Reed Smoot of Utah, a Republican and a prominent member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), was

blaming the costly fire on cigarette smoking and accordingly prepared a bill. As far as he was concerned, smoking should be banned in all government departments during working hours.

Employees were questioned extensively about their tobacco habits. Some speculated perhaps shavings from the carpenter shop had sparked a sort of spontaneous combustion. The most interesting theory was put forth by an Ohio woman who was absolutely certain the fire had destroyed all evidence of heirship — part of a conspiracy to keep her family from inheriting what was rightfully theirs.⁸

Ultimately, after exhaustive investigation, the blaze's cause was never determined. A renewed outcry for a national archives facility inevitably followed the disaster. *The Washington Post* was horrified to discover Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were housed in wooden cabinets at the State Department.

By the end of January 1921 damaged records were moved to a temporary location. Rumors began to spread that no salvage efforts would be made and that Director Rogers was recommending an authorization from Congress to destroy the 1890 census.

Historians, attorneys, The National Genealogical Society and The Daughters of the American Revolution wrote letters of protest to Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover, as well as the Librarian of Congress and any other government official who would listen. Hoover denied any such plan to destroy the records.

However, four months later the records were still piled in a warehouse and newly-appointed census director William Steuart decided to send them back to the census building. He ordered the records bound (if possible) and put in some semblance of order.

No one seems to know much about what was going on with the records between 1922 and 1932, but in December 1932 the Chief Clerk of the Census Bureau sent a report to the Library of Congress a listing of records, deemed no longer necessary for official government business and scheduled for destruction.

The Librarian was asked to review the list and determine whether anything was worthy of preservation for historical purposes. The 22nd item on the list read: "Schedules, Population . . . 1890, Original".

For whatever reason the Librarian found nothing on the list, including item 22, worthy of historical preservation and sent the list ahead without further comment. Congress authorized the destruction on February 21, 1933, although it's possible the records weren't completely destroyed until 1935. The very day Congress authorized the destruction, then President Herbert Hoover laid the cornerstone for the National Archives Building.

In 1942 the National Archives found a bundle of Illinois records as part of another shipment from the Census Bureau, thought to be the only surviving records for several years until in 1953 fragments from several other states (Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas, and the District of Columbia) were found. These were microfilmed and indexed, and although only 6,160 names are included, they are someone's ancestors, as noted by *Prologue Magazine* (National Archives publication).

What exactly might a genealogist glean from any of these fragmentary records? It, of course, depends on how much of the page was salvaged. Of these fragmentary records some are in better condition than others in relation to where they were located during the fire.

Here are some examples of two salvaged records, one entirely intact and enumerating the Smith family of River Bend, Gaston County, North Carolina, the other showing a damaged page for the Smith family of Ellis County, Texas:

FAMILY SCHEDULE-1 TO 10 PERSONS. 5117

Supervisor's District No. 200
 Enumeration District No. 122
 County: Gaston
 Street and No.:
 Enumerated by me on the 9 day of June, 1890.

SCHEDULE No. 1
 POPULATION AND SOCIAL STATISTICS

PERSONS	1		2		3		4		5	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1. Name of head of family	James A. Smith	Ann B. Smith	John S. Smith	Elizabeth S. Smith	James B. Smith	Ann C. Smith	John D. Smith	Elizabeth E. Smith	James F. Smith	Ann G. Smith
2. Name of wife										
3. Name of children	John	Elizabeth	James	Ann	John	Elizabeth	James	Ann	John	Elizabeth
4. Name of other persons										
5. Name of other persons										
6. Name of other persons										
7. Name of other persons										
8. Name of other persons										
9. Name of other persons										
10. Name of other persons										
11. Name of other persons										
12. Name of other persons										
13. Name of other persons										
14. Name of other persons										
15. Name of other persons										
16. Name of other persons										
17. Name of other persons										
18. Name of other persons										
19. Name of other persons										
20. Name of other persons										
21. Name of other persons										
22. Name of other persons										
23. Name of other persons										
24. Name of other persons										
25. Name of other persons										

FAMILY SCHEDULE-1 TO 10 PERSONS. 5148

Supervisor's District No. 3
 Enumeration District No. 122
 County: Ellis
 Street and No.:
 Enumerated by me on the 19 day of June, 1890.

SCHEDULE No. 1
 POPULATION AND SOCIAL STATISTICS

PERSONS	1		2		3		4		5	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1. Name of head of family	James A. Smith	Ann B. Smith	John S. Smith	Elizabeth S. Smith	James B. Smith	Ann C. Smith	John D. Smith	Elizabeth E. Smith	James F. Smith	Ann G. Smith
2. Name of wife										
3. Name of children	John	Elizabeth	James	Ann	John	Elizabeth	James	Ann	John	Elizabeth
4. Name of other persons										
5. Name of other persons										
6. Name of other persons										
7. Name of other persons										
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22. Name of other persons										
23. Name of other persons										
24. Name of other persons										
25. Name of other persons										

Both of these records are found in a database at Ancestry.com, the “1890 United States Federal Census Fragment” (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/5445/>). It is truly a shame that the vast majority of these records were lost, especially owing to the fact it was the one and only year each family was enumerated on a single sheet of paper (more depending on family size). How fragmentary are they? According to Ancestry these are what’s left:

- Alabama—Perry County
- District of Columbia—Q, S, 13th, 14th, RQ, Corcoran, 15th, SE, and Roggs streets, and Johnson Avenue
- Georgia—Muscookee County (Columbus)
- Illinois—McDonough County: Mound Township
- Minnesota—Wright County: Rockford
- New Jersey—Hudson County: Jersey City
- New York—Westchester County: Eastchester; Suffok County: Brookhaven Township
- North Carolina—Gaston County: South Point Township, Ricer Bend Township; Cleveland County: Township No. 2
- Ohio—Hamilton County (Cincinnati); Clinton County: Wayne Township
- South Dakota—Union County: Jefferson Township
- Texas—Ellis County: S.P. no. 6, Mountain Peak, Ovila Precinct; Hood County: Precinct no. 5; Rusk County: Precinct no. 6 and J.P. no. 7; Trinity County: Trinity Town and Precinct no. 2; Kaufman County: Kaufman.

It was truly hit-and-miss, just the luck or misfortune of location in relation to the fire and water damage.

The 1921 fire and resulting destruction of thousands upon thousands of records has been called a genealogical “black hole”. But, is it really so bleak? Yes and no, depending on the availability of substitutions and whether or not any relate to one’s research.

Again, Ancestry has compiled a special database, aggregating a number of 1890 records scattered across the country – random, at best, but better than nothing! The database, “1890 Census Substitute” can be found at:

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/categories/1890census/>

This one does include the 1890 census fragments mentioned above, the 1890 Veterans Schedules and a significant number of city directories (each of these can also be searched separately - see links on the page link noted above). There are also a few state census records – Iowa (1885 and 1895), Florida (1885), Colorado (1885) and South Dakota (1885 and 1895).

How might a city directory help? Take the example of Dr. Q. Cincinnatus Smith, an Austin, Texas physician and surgeon who appears in 1885, 1891, 1892 and 1895 Austin city directories (1890 substitute records). If utilizing Ancestry.com for researching Dr. Smith (who generally went by “Dr. Q.C. Smith”, his first name being “Quintus”), you would see a gap in records. You may also need to combine any 1890 substitute records with a bit of newspaper and “Google” research. This example broadens the search beyond the 1890 census substitute, but demonstrates a lesson in tracking down missing ancestors and/or gaps in their migration (call it a bonus lesson!).

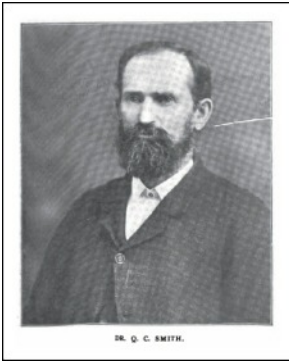
He was born in Tennessee in 1843 to Moab Stephen and Sarah (Thompson) Smith, enumerated with his family in 1850 and, according to the records thread, served as a Confederate soldier during the Civil War.

The next available census record (1870) finds Q.C. in Stoddard County, Missouri, enumerated as a physician, an occupation also verified by the Austin city directory records. A marriage record indicates he had married Mary Sykes in 1869. However, the records thread skips to the 1900 census where Q.C. is still residing in Austin. In 1910 he is residing in San Diego, California, where he died the following year.

Finding Q.C. in the 1890 census substitutes is a piece of the puzzle, but taking it a bit farther I wanted to know where he was in 1880 – did he go from Missouri (he wasn’t in Missouri in the 1880 census that I could find) directly to Austin or was there something in between those years. I could have guessed where he might have been before 1885 (the first Austin city directory record I found), but I would have been wrong.

A newspaper and a bit of Google research was in order. Much to my surprise (I never would have guessed!) I found “Q.C. Smith” in California in the early 1870s. The first instance of “Dr. Q.C. Smith” was found in 1874 in a Stockton newspaper. He lived in Cloverdale and had been called to attend to a 13 year-old boy who accidentally shot himself. The bullet traveled through the right side of his body, nicking the upper liver and finally lodging in the shoulder blade after tearing part of his lungs. Upon arrival, Dr. Smith “took hold of the case with energy”. Three weeks later the boy “had so far recovered as to be turned over into the hands of the cook; and on that day began to annoy his mother by begging her to be permitted to go a fishing.”⁹

By 1878 Q.C. was also proprietor of a drug store in conjunction with his medical practice. In early 1879 he was noted as the town's librarian, then reportedly selling out his drug store interest later that year. Curiously, on the same day (December 4) the local newspaper mentioned "Dr. Q.C. Smith is at present located at Bellevue Hospital, New York."¹⁰ No explanation - hmm.



Five months later the Cloverdale newspaper announced "Dr. Q.C. Smith, formerly of this place, appears to be well suited with his new location in Austin, Texas."¹¹ All of which means he arrived in Austin around May

1880, although the Bellevue Hospital visit wasn't explained in the newspaper. It's unclear, however, why he doesn't appear in the 1880 census in Austin (enumeration commenced on June 1).

Q.C. was enumerated in Austin in 1900, remaining there until 1905 when the *San Diego Union* announced "Dr. And Mrs. Q.C. Smith, parents of Dr. H. Steven Smith [their son], arrived on last evening's train from Austin, Tex. to make their home in this city."¹² Quintus Cincinnatus Smith died in San Diego on October 27, 1911. In the case of Q.C. Smith the 1890 substitutes were only a small part of his story.

Veterans Special Schedule

The Pension Office had requested the special enumeration for Union veterans to enable them to locate fellow comrades for attestation purposes to validate their pension claims. In addition future pension legislation would be dependent on the number of survivors and widows potentially filing claims. Some congressmen thought it might be useful to ascertain the effects of

various levels of military service on veteran longevity.

The veteran's name, rank, regiment or vessel, enlistment date, discharge date and length of service were recorded. At the bottom of each page was space to record addresses, known disabilities and general remarks. For instance, the remarks might record promotions or other notations such as "prisoner at Andersonville".

Sometimes Confederate veterans would be listed, as well as veterans of the Mexican War or even the War of 1812. If a census supervisor saw a Confederate veteran they might have marked through the line although it still may have been readable.

You may assume the 1890 Veterans Schedules were also lost in the fire. Not so, actually. After asking for the additional information in 1890 it was determined three years later (when the government got around to considering them I suppose) that too much time had passed since the information wasn't as pertinent any longer.

In 1894 Congress authorized the transfer of the schedules to the Commissioner of Pensions. Shortly thereafter files were transferred, bundled, sequentially numbered and stored alphabetically by state or territory. In 1930 custody changed hands again when the Pensions Office turned them over to the newly-created Veterans Administration.

Clearly, these schedules had been maintained in an entirely different location than the doomed 1890 general census records. However, by 1943 when the records were to be transferred once and for all to the National Archives, nearly all the schedules for Alabama through Kansas and about half of Kentucky had been destroyed. Unfortunately, an index of these schedules was never prepared. Even so, part of Kentucky through Wyoming yields over 990,000 records.

There are other records outside these aggregated 1890 substitutes, however – more than one might imagine. Some at Ancestry and even more at Family Search. Following are some highlighted records (plus “research adventures”), followed by tips to use the Card Catalog (and beyond).

Oklahoma Territorial Census (1890)

The government hadn’t an inkling in 1890 how important this special territorial census would eventually become. Just over a year after the government offered a land rush of unassigned lands, a census was conducted in the six “boomer” counties (Canadian, Cleveland, Kingfisher, Logan, Oklahoma and Payne), plus Beaver which became known as the “Seventh County” after being part of Cimarron Territory from 1886-1890.

The database is available at Ancestry through subscription:

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8925/>

First Territorial Census of Oklahoma

Shawcross William J	House	Dr	M	26	Ill	26/19
Minnie	Wife	W	F	22	Ill	22/11
Nellie	Daughter	Dr	F	3	Kans	11
Infant	"	W	F	4M	Oklahoma	4

William J. Shawcross, his wife Minnie and two young daughters were numerated in Logan County. William and Minnie were both born in Illinois and daughter Nellie was three and born in Kansas. The baby, born in Oklahoma was four months old. Thus, the Shawcross family had been in Oklahoma at least four months, likely longer if they were part of the land rush. As a matter of fact, it appears they were and the clues above, accompanied by newspaper research, led to an interesting story.

William J. Shawcross was born in Illinois in 1864 and the Ancestry records thread indicates he was the son of Samuel and Mary Shawcross. In 1880 Mary is widowed and she and her four children (Nellie, William John and Samuel) and sister Lydia are living in Chicago. Mary is a vest maker and Lydia a dressmaker. The next census record for the brothers is the 1890 Oklahoma Territorial Census. Had the brothers struck out together, perhaps to Kansas?

Newspapers.com is an excellent web site for Kansas newspapers and a search for “Shawcross” yielded a cache of clues. The first reference to the name made me wonder if it might belong to Mary, based on her last known occupation of vest maker:

A Card.

I wish to state to the people of Anthony that I have sold my millinery store to Mrs. Shawcross who will hereafter conduct the business at the old stand on Jennings avenue. I can heartily recommend Mrs. Shawcross to all my old patrons and others who need anything in this line, as a pleasant and reliable lady to deal with, and ask that you give her a share of your patronage. All accounts not settled with me before July 4th can be settled with Mrs. Shawcross. Mrs. Dora Murray. Anthony June 30th 1885.¹³

While it might possibly be Mary in Anthony (Harper County), the first reference to William occurred in Cheyenne County one year later. However, Harper borders Oklahoma and Cheyenne is in the upper northwest corner of the state. On July 16, 1886 it was reported that deputy sheriff Shawcross had served papers and the following month he was seen escorting a horse thief “whom he had hand cuffed right up in style.”¹⁴

William was making a name for himself and on November 3, 1886 he was married in Bird City:

Married

*On the morning of the 3d inst., Mr. W.J. Shawcross and Miss Minnie Cummings, both of Bird City, were united in marriage at the residence of John Elliott, Judge D.W. Cave officiating. The groom is the present Deputy Sheriff of this county, and his conduct as an officer has ever been beyond reproach. The bride is well known in this vicinity, and has hosts of friends. Immediately after the ceremonies were performed, the bride and groom started for Atwood, accompanied by Mr. James H. King and Miss Nettie Elliott. The party returned Thursday evening. Will “set ‘em up” to the boys, and everything resumed its usual equilibrium. The Frontiersman extends its congratulations.*¹⁵

W. J. SHAWCROSS,
—THE—
Tonsorial Artist
NURRAY BLOCK,
BIRD CITY, - KANS.

Around this time newspapers began referring to “W.J. Shawcross, Tonsorial Artist”.¹⁶ Whether or not this is the same person is unclear since William was still referenced as a deputy sheriff. In August 1887, “a young lady put in her appearance”¹⁷ – Minnie had given birth to their daughter Nellie. By May 1888 William was listed among Bird City’s city officers, serving as Marshall. By March 1889 he was looking for greener pastures – “Will and Johnny Shawcross are making extensive preparations for their overland journey to the Oklahoma elderado [sic].” As the two brothers “hit the road” friends and neighbors wished them “health and fortune”.¹⁸

Oklahoma’s land rush was of great interest in northwest Kansas as one correspondent for the *Cheyenne County Democrat* reported on the scene:

THE LAND OF PROMISE

Incidents and Accidents of Oklahoma

THE BIRD CITY DELEGATION

Billy and Johnny Shawcross came into town to enter claims while I was there and prevailed on me to go to their farms on a hunting trip, with wonderful tales of the wild deer and turkey that abounded in the copses. . . .

With one-half of the Oklahoma advertising, Cheyenne county would be densely populated today and Bird City, with its beautiful location and natural advantages, would discount Guthrie in size and permanency. . .

*Along in the rare days of June you will see the Shawcross brothers pulling into Bird City from the south-east, healthier perhaps, dirtier unquestionably, poorer no doubt, but wiser boys.*¹⁹

Clearly, Bird City was fond of Will Shawcross and predicted he'd be back home soon, but he decided to stick it out. In early 1890 rumors of Will having killed a man in Oklahoma territory were discounted. When Will and Minnie were enumerated in June their youngest daughter was only four months old. In November sad news was relayed back to Cheyenne County:

*Word was received here one day this week, of the death of Mrs. Minnie Shawcross, caused by Typhoid fever.*²⁰

Will had barely settled in the Territory and was now a widower. While there are no mentions of remarriage, it's possible Mary was helping to raise his children since she received 160 acres of land in 1892. Brother John had filed for and received the same amount of land the previous year.

The name Shawcross came up in Oklahoma newspapers during the 1890s. Bill Shawcross (presumably William) was constable in Guthrie in 1897. Apparently, brother Sam and later John went to Colorado to mine gold. John was killed in a mine accident in the fall of 1898. Bill (William?) Shawcross was in Colorado during 1899 and much of 1900, returning in October.

A year later William J. Shawcross was caught in crossfire at a saloon brawl in Shawnee.

A PEACEMAKER IS SLAIN

William Shawcross in Trying to Stop a Row is Slain

John Lowe shot and killed William Shawcross in a saloon brawl here Saturday night about 9:30 o'clock. Shawcross was trying to stop a quarrel between John Lowe, city scavenger, and one Roy Hamilton. When Lowe shot at Hamilton, Shawcross stepped between them and received the bullet in the left side, dying

*instantly. Will Shawcross was a barkeeper in the House of Lords and was never known to be in a quarrel of any kind before.*²¹

A coroner's inquest was held, whereupon jurors determined William Shawcross had died as a result of gun shot, fired by one John Lowe "without justifiable or excusable cause." The murderer would get a "quick trip to the penitentiary as the result of his awful deed . . . The blow to his family is a terrible one and Lowe himself when he realizes that he has taken the life of a man who was in fact his friend must suffer all the torments of the damned."²²

Clearly, Will was much beloved, "a well known character in many Oklahoma towns having been a pioneer in many of them. He was a warm hearted, generous fellow who counted his friends by the score and his unfortunate taking off is sincerely regretted by all.

His parents and family are quite prominent in Colorado and at their solicitation the remains were taken to Guthrie for interment."²³

Upon notice of his death Will's family began gathering, his sister Nellie traveling from Chicago to attend the funeral. Mary and Sam were traveling from Colorado, but no mention of his daughters. It appears, however, daughter Nellie married John O'Brien and she, like her mother, died rather young in Nebraska in 1919.

For this story, the 1890 Oklahoma Territorial Census was key in uncovering facts and records not (easily) found at Ancestry. Knowing that daughter Nellie was born in Kansas gave me reason to search newspapers there and voilà, an interesting story don't you think?

While this database is available at Ancestry, a searchable index (free) is available at the Oklahoma Historical Society web site:

<https://www.okhistory.org/research/1890>

1890 Oklahoma Territorial Census

Your search returned 7 results.

Name	Age	Sex	Race	Birthplace	Page No.
John Shawcross	23	M	W	Illinois	1225
Samuel Shawcross	18	M	W	Illinois	1225
Mary J Shawcross	51	F	W	NJ	1225
William J Shawcross	26	M	W	Illinois	1231
Minnie Shawcross	22	F	W	Illinois	1231
Nellie Shawcross	3	F	W	Kans	1231
Infant Shawcross	4 mo	F	W	Oklahoma	1231

It's always a good idea to look around for alternate sources. In this case, it's a free one. Whatever state you are researching in, by all means check out its state historical society web site. Texas has a great resource, Portal to Texas History.

<https://texashistory.unt.edu/>

There you'll find newspapers which exist nowhere else online, and thousands upon thousands of records, photographs, journals and more – all FREE!

Family Search is also another great place to find free resources. For 1890 substitutes there are quite a number of possibilities, some online and some available through the Family History Library.

Sign into your account at Family Search (or create one: <https://www.familysearch.org/>).

Select "Search" and the "Catalog". To bring up a large number of records to choose from, select "Title" and type "1890"; select "Keywords" and also type "1890". Press "Search". As you can see there are well over 8000 records and a narrower search is needed. There is more than one way to narrow the search, however, but the easiest way is to specify the location you are researching. For instance, select "Place" and type "Montgomery"; scroll down until you locate Montgomery County, Texas and

select. Click the "Update" button and see more specific results:

- 1890 Montgomery County, Texas, census: uniquely reconstructed and annotated
- File Records of deeds, mortgages, etc. 1879-1890
- 1890 tax records, Montgomery County, Texas

Although none of these records are available online, open each one to see bibliographic information. Select the last record, published by the Montgomery County Genealogical and Historical Society.

Proceed to the society's web site:

<http://www.mcgandhs.com/index.html>

and click "Publications". At the top you will see a link "Hard Copy of Publications Catalog". Click that link and a PDF will download. The 1890 Tax Records book referred to at Family Search is available through the society for \$12.00 (page 12). There are actually a number of books unrelated to Montgomery County (other Texas counties – worth a look).

Anyone who has been researching for any length of time likely realizes finding one's ancestors involves trying many "keys" to unlock hidden caches of records, photos, and so on.

Genealogists love census records because they are fairly easy to both access and assess, making the missing 1890 census a discouraging "black hole" for some who haven't yet tried a little creativity. Why guess (or fudge) when you can do a little extra digging and maybe find a really interesting story!

