

Using SOUNDEX Codes for Census Records

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. The SOUNDEX coding system was developed so that you can find a surname even though it may have been recorded under various spellings.

You must know at least your ancestor's full name. Although not absolutely necessary, it is helpful to know the full name of the head of household in which your ancestor lived because census takers recorded information under that name.

To search for a particular surname, you must first work out its code. Every SOUNDEX code consists of a letter and three numbers, like S650. The letter is always the first letter of the surname. The numbers are assigned to the remaining letters of the surname according to the SOUNDEX coding guide.

SOUNDEX CODING GUIDE	
The Number	Represents the letters
1	B P F V
2	C S K G J Q X Z
3	D T
4	L
5	M N
6	R

DISREGARD THE LETTERS A E I O U W Y and H

EXAMPLES OF NAMES CODED WITH SOUNDEX	
WASHINGTON	
W252	
KUJNE	JONES
K500	J520

STEP 1

On line 1, write the surname you are coding, placing one letter in each box.

Line 1										
Line 2										

STEP 2: On line 2, write the first letter of the surname in the box.

STEP 3

On line 1, disregarding the first letter, slash through the remaining letters A, E, I, O, U, W, Y, and H.

STEP 4

On line 2, write the numbers found on the Soundex Coding Guide (above) for the first three remaining unslashed letters. Add zeros to any empty boxes. Disregard any additional letters.

Most surnames can be coded using the above four steps. For names with prefixes, double letters, or letters side by side that have the same number on the SOUNDEX coding guide, see "ADDITIONAL RULES" on the following page.

ADDITIONAL RULES !

Names with Prefixes

If your surname has a prefix-- like Van, Von, De, or Le-- you should code it both with and without the prefix because it might be listed under either code. (Mc and Mac are NOT considered prefixes!)

Names with Double Letters

If your surname has any double letters, they should be treated as one letter. Thus, in the surname Lloyd, the second L should be slashed out; in the surname Gutierrez, the second R should be slashed out.

Names with Letters Side by Side that have the same Number on the Soundex Coding Guide

Your surname may have different letters that are side by side and have the same number on the Soundex Coding Guide; for example, PF in Pfister (1 is the number for both P and F): CKS in Jackson (2 is the number for C, K, and S). These letters should be treated as one letter. Thus, in the name Pfister, F should be slashed out; in the name Jackson, K and S should be slashed out.

With your ancestor's name correctly coded, you are ready to use the microfilmed Soundex Card Index, which is organized first by state, then by Soundex Code, and then alphabetically by first name or initial.