

# 1841 South Australian census

## *What you will and won't find*

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The 1841 census in South Australia was conducted in difficult circumstances when the colony was not five years old. The small population and the large distances involved resulted in a relatively poor coverage. Fortunately the majority of the citizens of 1841 lived in or near Adelaide and were counted by the enumerators. Just over 2900 households in Adelaide and the nearby villages representing nearly 9200 people were covered and a further 6200 people were located beyond this region. Just how many people were living in the colony at the time is uncertain but it was certainly more than the 15436<sup>1</sup> recorded in the census. 11518 people are known to have arrived as free passengers by 1841, but records are not able to determine pre-1841 departures, overland and coastal arrivals, and those who paid their own passage to South Australia. In spite of this, the census is a significant piece of Australian history in its own right as it is the only surviving nineteenth century post-convict Australian population survey! In spite of its sociological significance, it remains relatively unknown to researchers.

You will find a number of references indicating that the census was undertaken in January 1841 and a few suggesting July 1841 and even others suggesting that it coincided with the British census of 6/7 June 1841. Trawling thorough official records of the era reveal a lack of material on the census, but one can get an indication from the Colonial Secretary's Correspondence files of the day. On 12 Dec 1840, the Colonial Secretary, Robert Gouger, in response to a letter seeking advice on when to undertake the census (SA State Records: Colonial Secretary's Correspondence Files Outwards GRG 24/1 [1840] 576) wrote to the Town Clerk with the forms and requesting they be completed as soon as possible. (SA State Records: Colonial Secretary's Correspondence Files Outwards GRG 24/4 [1840] p347 No 325 12 Dec) He writes to JB Harvey at Port Lincoln on 17 Apr 1841 telling him that the census has been completed except for the Port Lincoln area and enclosed forms to be completed. (SA State Records: Colonial Secretary's Correspondence Files Outwards GRG 24/4 [1841] p386 No 79 17 Apr) Furthermore, there is ample evidence available in government departmental records such as police station journals and the like, that the census enumeration in nineteenth century South Australia was a lengthy process beyond built up areas and never undertaken on a single date as was the case with the British undertaking or even modern Australian censuses. The colony was a large place and it was just physically impossible to cover the whole landmass in a single day or even a single month. Unfortunately there are no surviving records located to date to verify this theory for the 1841 census, but later censuses undertakings revealed in remote police station journals shows troopers delivering the householders' schedule and not returning to collect it for weeks and sometimes months. Despite all this, we can be fairly certain that apart from the Port Lincoln district, the 1841 census is a snapshot of the population in the first quarter of 1841.

The colony had previously been divided into administrative districts and the more populous of these were used in the compiling of the census, namely:

District A: north of Bay Road (now Anzac Highway) & Greenhill Road excluding Adelaide but including Port Adelaide and west of Mt Lofty

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<sup>1</sup> This figure includes the 526 aborigines counted at Port Lincoln (pp263/4) and the 8 aborigines tallied on p272.

District B: south of Bay Road and Greenhill Road to 35°10' and west of Mt Lofty  
District C: from 35°10' [i.e. mouth of the Onkaparinga River] to 35°20' [i.e. base of Sellicks Hill] and west of Mt Lofty  
Districts D, E, F were not collated

*SA State Records: Colonial Secretary's Correspondence Files Outwards GRG 24/1 [1840] 576*

As with its British counterpart, the census householder schedules have not survived. What we have is very much a secondary document, and all that implies, in the enumerators' returns. Unfortunately an extensive search of records has failed to reveal how people were employed to collect the census. We know that in remote regions, government officials were used but what of the built up areas such as Adelaide itself? In fact there was a dispute between the very recently established city council and the colonial government over the census in 1841. It would seem that the government expected the council to manage and finance the process within the city of Adelaide itself but the council was having none of that. Robert Gouger writes to the Mayor and Town Clerk in December 1840 regarding this matter and points out that the colonial government would take responsibility for the districts. (SA State Records: Colonial Secretary's Correspondence Files Outwards GRG 24/4 [1840]

*From the Office  
11 December 1840*

*Sir*

*I am instructed by the  
Common Council to acknowledge re-  
ceipt of your letter to the Mayor  
of the 9<sup>th</sup> instant, and to state  
that the Council will be happy to  
Co-operate with the Government  
in taking the proposed general  
Census of the Province, and with  
this view they beg to be favored  
with the Government forms on  
the subject, and to know when  
it is proposed that the Census  
should be taken.*

*I have the honor to be  
Sir  
Your most obed<sup>t</sup> Serv<sup>t</sup>  
David Spence  
Town Clerk*

*Robert Gouger  
Colonial Secy*

p345 No 322 9 Dec; p347 No 325 12 Dec; p361 No 20 22 Jan 1841) This was further confirmed in the Register with a Council report indicating support for the census and seeking the forms. (*Register* 26 Dec 1840 p4 col c) This reference clearly indicates that the Adelaide Council undertook the census collection within the confines of its jurisdiction, that is, Adelaide and North Adelaide.

One would have thought that such an event as the very first census in the colony should have rated a mention in a number of locations but this would appear not to be so! A search of the *Government Gazettes* from July 1840 through to the end of 1841 fails to reveal any mention

of the census. There appears to be no reference in the press either. That valued publication for serious family history research, *Parliamentary Papers*, does not commence until after the census was taken.

A typed index was created in 1949 and this has been widely used until quite recently when the author published a searchable CD version. The former index is available at SA State Library, SA State Records and SA Genealogy & Heraldry Society Inc. This index contains a number of errors largely resulting from some wrong interpretations of hand-written entries: CRAMP instead of GRAMP; McKAY for McHARG; Mrs LIGHT rather than Wm LIGHT; etc which, among other issues, promoted the new publication.

While each household was enumerated giving only the head of the household's name in built up areas, in the country each person is listed on their own line so that you can see the names of all members of the family although like the British counterpart, no relationships are indicated. The author has attempted to identify the individuals in the material where the household is just tallied. Thus the census indicates on page 1 that William CRABB was living in Angas street Adelaide and the household contained 3 males (ages under 7, under 14 and under 50) and 3 females (ages under 14 [2 entries] and under 50). Research using a range of records<sup>2</sup> has determined that these people, who arrived on the *Java* in 1840, are William CRABB born 25 Sep 1803 Liskeard CON (i.e.: the male under 50), Ane Marie CRABB nee STAPLETON born about 1798 (i.e. the female under 50), James Stapleton CRABB born 1829 (i.e. the male under 14), Bessy Ann CRABB b. 1830 (i.e. a female under 14), Sarah Ann CRABB born 1833 (i.e. a female under 14), and Henry CRABB born 1839 (i.e. the male under 7).

The page numbering as outlined in this old index was created after the papers were transferred to the archives from the Colonial Secretary's Files held in the Chief Secretary's Office in 1920. The records were originally held in a geographical order. Thus as illustrated, page 263 bears no significance for researchers and unlike the British counterpart, a researcher cannot *follow in the steps of the enumerator!*

The census material itself contains a number of errors and we do not have access to the householders' returns to determine if these were primary errors or as the result of copying the originals...

- The tallying is sometimes incorrect: James S ALSTON is counted as a female under 14 years; Sarah COKER is counted as a male under 50 years; etc
- There are many errors and surname variants: BILL instead of BELL; SLOMAN instead of SLEMAN; BROOKES instead of BROOKER; ACLAND rather than ACKLAND; etc. There are 130 known examples of this problem ranging from minor to major. The chances of determining that DETMAN is entered as ZETMAN is quite remote but the lesson here is that if you have the opportunity to search using a database, you should always try a wildcard search where a letter or group of letters is replaced by an asterisk. Thus \*tman would have located every name ending in this group of letters including DETMAN, ZETMAN and even BATMAN!

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<sup>2</sup> *Register of applications by labourers in the United Kingdom for free passage to South Australia* AJCP Reel 875 Embarkation # 5839, *1841 South Australian Directory* p136, *Biographical Index of South Australians 1836–1886* Vol 1 p336 col a, EAD Opie, *South Australian records prior to 1841* p92, Ship Manifests GRG 41/8 Vol/page: 2/129, Mortlock Library of South Australia Collection Ref: D 4718 (L), and Register 8 February 1840.

Very few indigenous people were included in the tallying. The exception being pages 263/4 (page 263 is pictured) where an attempt was made to count the natives at Port Lincoln. It has been estimated that the 15000 aborigines living in the region in 1788<sup>3</sup> had already been significantly reduced in number by European diseases.

One other unresolved issue affects the tallying...

Page 81 - headed Islington.

It is claimed in the preface of the copy held by SA State Library that this page does not seem to fit the pattern of the other pages and indeed most names on this page can also be found on pp83; 85-87. It is thought that this page is the remnants of an earlier census that has found its way into the series. While some names appear as claimed on pp83; 85-87, the tallies do not match and so this theory needs to be treated with some caution.

SA State Records: 1841 Census GRG 24/13 p263

A significant feature of the British 1841 Census that skewed the results was not evident in South Australia. The advent of comprehensive census taking in Britain was confronted with strong opposition from some quarters. Just what the significance of this opposition was on the result cannot be determined but there were five main objections...

- on theological grounds as some believed numbering the people was blasphemous,
- from a suspicion that the object of the exercise was to extract more taxes,
- the conspiracy theory also embraced the worry that the census was part of the Poor Law Act implementation to force a resettlement of poor people, or their emigration back to their original parishes,
- others considered it an invasion of a private individual's privacy,
- while a few thought it was a threat to their liberty.

Names of natives at Port Lincoln 263  
Known to the Head Mr. Schurman  
J. B. Hawking -

Name	Males						Females						Totals	
	7	14	21	28	35	42	7	14	21	28	35	42	Males	Females
Neelta						1								
Sambanta						1								
Canyeleuti						1								
Tiuleri						1								
Kulericundoo						1								
Kunamunkoo						1								
Managutta						1								
Maletatta						1								
Maltattoo						1								
Mitalta (Malboo)						1								
Mittgatta						1								
Mugitta (Mulboo)						1								
Muntatta						1								
Munrabirini						1								
Mungatta						1								
Murpatta						1								
Mungatta						1								
Neentilli						1								
Namatta						1								
Narrabatta						1								
Nyatta						1								
Nyngatta						1								
Nyubatta						1								
Nyuntatta						1								
Nyumbatta						1								
Pedlee						1								
Pinnara						1								
Poznatta						1								
Wolcarra						1								
Tumbatta						1								

4. 5. 18. 4  
\* Malboo - a word signifying  
"murderer" - these men are said to be the murderers of  
Francis Hudson

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<sup>3</sup> The Wakefield companion to South Australian history, 2001 p420

A search of the Adelaide newspapers of the day for the three months period leading up to and following the census failed to reveal a single concern from the proprietors or through the letters to the editors.

As previously indicated, an attempt has been made to link the names in the census with those in the following material...

2900 biographies of varying detail have been compiled using:

- Register of Emigrant Labourers seeking Free Passage 1836–1841
- 1840 *South Australian Directory*
- 1841 *South Australian Directory*
- *SA Births 1842–1906*
- *SA Marriages 1842–1916*
- *SA Deaths 1842–1915*
- *Biographical Index of South Australians 1836–1885*
- *Hotels and Publicans in South Australia*
- *Government Gazettes* to 1842
- Sundry shipping records located at SA State Library and SA State Records

This should enable the reader to identify some of the occupants in households other than the head as previously demonstrated with the CRABB family. Using these resources the author has managed to prepare biographies on over 3000 of the people enumerated in the census as at the time of the census. As with all such research, readers are cautioned that this work has been of a cursory nature and it is important that the material be confirmed. By using all these resources to supplement one another, the researcher has a good chance of building up a picture of their pre-Civil Registration South Australian family.

Interestingly, the *Register* newspaper published the *Official Returns of Country Sections Cultivated in 1840* during mid 1841 which is a very useful resource, a census substitute if you like, for those with land holding ancestors. Over nine issues<sup>4</sup> of the newspaper the details of each holding were published by district<sup>5</sup> under the headings of;

- Number of Section
- Name of Place or Farm
- Name of Cultivator
- Extent of land in: Wheat; Barley; Oats; Maize; Potatoes; Garden
- Supplied with water and how
- Extent of land and how enclosed
- Remarks relative to crops, buildings such as dwelling house or wool houses; yards; quarries; irrigation; etc

Thus under the material listed for the District of Mount Barker published on 7 Aug 1841 we find a comprehensive outline of James SHAKES holding:

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<sup>4</sup> District A – Adelaide figures published 12 Jun 1841 p4; 19 Jun 1841 p4; 26 Jun 1841 p4.

District B – 3 Jul 1841 p4; 12 Jul 1841 p4.

District C – 17 Jul 1841 p4.

Northern Districts – 24 Jul 1841 p4.

Encounter Bay, Currency Creek, Inman Valley Districts – 24 Jul 1841 p4.

Mt Barker District etc – 31 Jul 1841 p8, 7 Aug 1841 p6

<sup>5</sup> The same districts used in the census and that makes it easy to match entries!

Number of Section	4424, 4425	Name of Place or Farm	Blackstone	Name of Cultivator	James Shakes and others	Extent of land in:						Supplied with water and how	Extent of land and how enclosed	Remarks relative to crops, buildings such as dwelling house or wool houses; yards; quarries; irrigation; etc
						Wheat	Barley	Oats	Maize	Potatoes	Garden			
						8	2	2 1/2	1/2	1		Well 17 feet deep with 4 feet of water	16 acres with posts on ends. 20 acres in progress	Wheat sown in the beginning of July, a fair crop; Barley sown in the August, a very good crop; Oats also sown in the August, short in straw but well filled in the ear.

407/4 187 129

NAME.	MALE.						FEMALE.						TOTAL.	
	UNDER 7 years of age	14	21	35	50	50	UNDER 7	14	21	35	50	50	MALES	FEMALES
Brought forward	25	23	29	74	20	8	28	21	17	37	7	4	178	112
Charlotte Strong														
Charlotte Webb														
John Evenc														
Richard Fanel														
Alexander Stewart														
James Shakes														
Harriet Shakes														
Harriet Shakes														
Richard Perkins														
Sarah Perkins														
Richard Perkins														
Mary Perkins														
Russ Perkins														
Thomas Donahoe														
Samy Donahoe														
Thomas Donahoe														
John Divers														
Elizabeth Divers														
Mary Divers														
Patrick Hughes														
Christina Hughes														
Martin Hughes														
Michael Hughes														
Mary Hughes														
W. E. Baylton														
Eliza Baylton														
Mary Jane Seaman														
Patrick Folley														
John Coe														
Charles Coe														
Carried forward	28	24	31	80	24	8	28	22	19	44	8	6	155	127

SA State Records: 1841 Census GRG 24/13 p129

The SHAKES family are listed on p129 of the census and this reveals the names of the family unit as James (under 35), Harriet (under 35) and their daughter, Harriet (under 7) together with their neighbours as illustrated. Turning to the *Register of applications by labourers in the United Kingdom for free passage to South Australia* and associated publications such as Pat Button's *Free Passage to Paradise*, we find James SHAKES, wife and daughter arrived on the *Java* in Feb 1840. Thus by using a variety of resources, not least of which is the 1841 census, researchers are often able to build up a better than expected picture of the earliest settlers in South Australia.

While the 1841 SA Census lacks the detail of its later UK counterparts, used in conjunction with other readily available material, the researcher can build up a comprehensive picture.