With the release of the 1940 U.S. Census, genealogists and family historians will have a heyday finding out, sometimes for the first time about relatives, friends and others from “the greatest generation.”

When the 120,000 census takers counted 132,164,569 people living in the country in April 1940, notes the msnbc.com story, the information collected included the address, whether the house was owned or rented, value of the home or monthly rent, is it considered a farm, names of adults and children, family relationships, sex, race, age, place of birth citizenship, residence five years earlier, education.

And, the site goes on, about 5 percent of the people were asked about the place of birth of their mother and father, language spoken in the home as a child, veteran status, wars served in, Social Security status, occupation, employment status, occupation, number of weeks worked in 1939, income and, for women, whether they had been married more than once, age at first marriage, and number of children every born.

In other words, a time capsule revealing information about Americans from that day, “as the country lingered in a Great Depression, still a year away from entry into war in Europe and the Pacific.”

This living history is available to anyone online. The catch is, the records can’t be searched by name. One must have an address to access the information. That’s why genealogists and history societies are asking for volunteers to help create a data base of every name in this census.

Two websites, Ancestry.com and the Mormon church’s FamilySearch.org, have plans to provide indexes. Anyone can help, by signing up through the1940census.com/society.

You can also contact the Iron County Genealogy Society at www.ironcountymigenealogicalsociety.org to find out more about the census and the project to index the names.

If you wish to check out the census, be warned, there are delays reported.

If you’re searching for an address, the msnbc.com story suggests you look at all the records for a specific block or street. If your area was settled in 1940, who lived there then, and what were their lives like?

Open. Search. Enjoy.

--Marian Volek