



Your Ancestor was ... Occupations of our Ancestors

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So you have found the occupation of your ancestor, now what?

- Ancestral occupations can give clues to who our ancestors were, how they lived, where they lived, and most importantly, give them individual identity and personality
- The sources that identify occupations are numerous
- Church records, city directories, census records, wills, and land records are just a few that may list professions

What was your ancestor's occupation?

- Many of our ancestors changed jobs or held more than one job
- Your farmer ancestor may have also been a teamster—using his horse and wagon to haul items for other people as a way to supplement the household finances
- Women may have had an occupation before, during, and after marriage

Four examples

Johann Georg Sommer
18th century German miller
Charles Steck
19th century blacksmith
Adam Borgmeier
19th century drayman
Christiana Würz Lauer
19th century midwife

Resources for locating occupations

- Census records
- Church records
- City directories
- Family occupations
- Immigration records
- Local histories
- Localities
- Newspapers
- Public / vital records
- Wills, land records

Resources – Census records

- Population schedules (1840–1930)
 - 1840 Census asked number of individuals involved in mining, agriculture, commerce, manufacturing and trade, navigation of the ocean, navigation of canals, lakes and rivers, learned professions and engineers
 - 1850 Census contained column for occupation
 - 1890 Veterans' and Widows' Schedules list military occupations
 - 1920 Census asked trade, profession, or particular kind of work done; industry, business, or establishment in which at work; whether employer, salary or wage worker, or working on own account
 - 1930 Census Codes
 - 1930 Census Bureau publication "Classified Index of Occupations"
 - <http://stevemorse.org/census/ocodes.htm>
- Mortality schedules (1850–1885)
- Slave schedules (1850–1860)
- Agricultural schedules (1850–1885)
- Agricultural schedules in 1850, 1860, and 1870—provides the following information for each farm: name of owner or manager, number of improved and unimproved acres, cash value of the farm, farming machinery, livestock, animals slaughtered during the past year, and "homemade manufactures." The 1880 schedules provide additional details, such as the amount of acreage used for each kind of crop, the number of poultry, and the number of eggs produced.
- Industry or manufacturing schedules (1810, 1820, 1850–1885)
- Manufacturing schedules in 1820, 1850, and 1860—reported the name of the manufacturer; the type of business or product; the amount of capital invested; the quantities, kinds, and value of raw materials used; the quantities, kinds, and value of product produced annually; the kind of power or machinery used; the number of men and women employed; and the average monthly cost of male and female labor.
- The amount of detail reported in these schedules increased in 1870 and again in 1880
- In 1880, supplemental schedules were also used for specific industries, such as for boot and shoemaking, lumber and saw mills, flour and grist mills
- Veterans' and Widows' schedules (1890)
- Social Statistics (1850–1870)
- Defective and Delinquent Classes schedules (1880)

Resources—Church records

- Baptisms
- Confirmations
- Marriage
- Death

Resources—City directories

- First city directory—Philadelphia, November, 1785
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 - New York—1786
 - Boston—1789
- Baltimore—1796
- Hartford—1799
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- Individual names include occupations
- Address identifies where business is located
- Employers may have advertisements
- Indexes of business

Resources—Family occupations

- Family history of occupations
- Family business passed on generation to generation
- Related occupations
 - One feeds the other
- Family name taken from ancestral occupation
- Family stories
- Ancestral clothing

Resources—Local histories

- Published anniversary documents
 - 100–1000 year local celebrations
 - Ancestors biography
 - Lists of businesses and occupations
 - Who's Who Books

Resources—Localities

Where did your ancestor live and how did that impact their choice and opportunity for employment?

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- Agricultural area
- Industrial area
- Waterways
- Desert
- Forests
- Small village
- Large town

Resources—Newspapers

- Birth announcements
- Death announcements
- Obituaries
- Miscellaneous articles

Resources—Public / vital records

- Birth certificates
 - Occupations of parents
 - Names of midwife or doctor
- Marriage certificates
 - Occupations of bride and groom
- Divorce certificates
- Death certificates
 - Occupation of deceased
- Social Security applications
- Military records, draft cards, and pension records

Resources—Business records

- Business journals
- Business archives
- Company histories
- Company websites
- Labor unions
- Newspapers

Resources—Fraternal organizations

Did you discover your ancestor belonged to a fraternal organization or society?

- Clues to membership can be found in photographs, cemetery monument inscriptions, obituaries, documents, and family lore
- If you know or suspect an ancestor belonged to an organization, check for a website, Google the organization name, or use the old-fashion method and look them up in a phone directory

Additional Resources

- Wills
- Estate inventories
- Land records
- Maps
- Tax records
- Voting records
- Translation—What is this occupation?

Occupations specific to localities

- West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky – Coal Miners
- Michigan – Shipping on the Great Lakes
- South Carolina – Cotton, Tobacco
- Mississippi – Riverboats
- Carroll County Maryland – Farming
- Oklahoma – Cattle ranching
- California – gold mining

Occupations of Old

Some occupations have changed little over the centuries, others have disappeared entirely. Entire industries can disappear in the blink of an eye. Much of our generation is employed at jobs which our parents never imagined.

- Floor Walker
- Drayman
- Well Master
- Lamp Lighter
- Ice Companies
- Mantua-maker
- Amanuensis – Secretary or stenographer
- Bluestocking – Female writer
- Brightsmith – Metal worker
- Burgonmaster – Mayor
- Collier – Coal miner
- Colporteur – Peddler of books
- Draper – A dealer in dry goods

- Fletcher – One who makes bows and arrows
- Glazier – Window glassman
- Hayward – Keeper of fences
- Jagger – Fish peddler
- Lardner – Keeper of the cupboard
- Lavender – Washer woman
- Muleskinner – Teamster
- Neatherder – Cow herder
- Ordinary Keeper – Innkeeper with fixed prices
- Pettifogger – A shyster lawyer
- Pigman – Crockery dealer
- Porter – Door keeper
- Saddler – One who makes, repairs or sells saddles or other furnishings for horses
- Shrieve – Sheriff
- Slater – Roofer
- Slopseller – Seller of ready-made clothes in a slop shop
- Spinster – A woman who spins

Helpful Links

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~rigenweb/ocupaton.html>

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~genepool/jobs.htm>

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wiashlan/occupations.html>

<http://www.olivetreegenealogy.com/misc/occupations.shtml>

The Book of English Trades, published in 1818 is also available for reading or download from Google Books: <http://books.google.com/books?id=G2>

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~dav4is/Sources/Occupations.html>