

# Research Strategies for Occupations and Genealogy

GENEALOGY BARGAINS

[HTTPS://GENEALOGYBARGAINS.COM](https://genealogybargains.com)

For most of our ancestors, an occupation was not necessarily a “career” as we see it in modern times, but a means of supporting oneself and one’s family. Whether your ancestor was a brick layer or a banker, there will be record sets to help discover more about your ancestors.



## Occupation Record Sets

- US & state census records.** The 1850 US Census was the first to list occupation for each member of the household. The 1840 Census did have a count of persons employed in specific occupations.
- Vital records.** Check marriage records as well as death certificates for occupation information.
- Wills and probate documents.** The decedent’s occupation would often be listed in these records especially if the assets of a business were to be parceled out to those mentioned in a will.
- Newspapers.** Obituaries list occupation of the dead as well as survivors. Check articles about the opening or closing of a business. Review advertisements an ancestor’s business.
- City and business directories.** Directories list occupations of residents. Check if your ancestor was a business owner and check for business advertisements in the directory.
- Passenger lists.** Occupations for both the incoming immigrant as well as the sponsor.
- Fraternal society records.** Some groups such were organized based on a specific profession or trade such as farming. Your ancestor may have belonged to a fraternal or trade group.
- Military records.** Draft cards often recorded occupations since some were considered vital to the war effort and this information was needed by the local draft board.

## Occupation Research Strategies

- What exactly is the occupation?** Some occupations no longer exist or there is a modern name for the occupation. Look for definitions of “old occupations” to make sure you understand the exact details of that occupation.
- Look for occupations on census sheets and other records.** Check population and mortality schedules for similar occupations. Certain workers often lived in the same building or neighborhood.
- Track company history.** Did your ancestor work for the same employer for 30, 40 or more years? Research the place of employment and locate newspaper articles for information on growth or decline, as well as job promotions.
- Plot and track place of employment.** Use Google Maps to pin work locations for your ancestors. Determine the location relative to their residence. A visual depiction of cluster research data can help your research.
- Share via social media.** Check Facebook groups related to companies that no longer exist or for former employees. Post information about your ancestor and their occupation.
- Check corporate archives & business records.** Contact the company (or determine the surviving company) and ask if they have an archive, the types of records to be found and how to access the archive.

Check out the **Researching Occupations Resource List** on the back page!

## Researching Occupations Resource List

- **Ancestry Message Boards: Occupations**  
<https://boards.ancestry.com/topics.occupations/mb.ashx>
- **Cyndi's List: Occupations**  
<https://www.cyndislist.com/occupations/>
- **Directory of Corporate Archives in the United States and Canada**  
<https://abundantgenealogy.com/corporate-archives-directory-us-can>
- **Dictionary of Old Occupations and Trades**  
<https://www.thoughtco.com/dictionary-of-old-occupations-and-trades-1422235>
- **Discovering the Occupations of Your Ancestors**  
<https://www.thoughtco.com/discovering-the-occupations-of-your-ancestors-1422324>
- **Employment Records – Genealogy Today**  
[https://data.genealogytoday.com/contents/Employment\\_Records.html](https://data.genealogytoday.com/contents/Employment_Records.html)
- **Surnames via Occupations**  
<https://surnames.behindthename.com/names/source/occupation>