

Occupational Records: Finding Work-Related Paper Trails

Presenter: Jessica Trotter

What types of gems can you find in occupational records? Farmers, Teachers, Coopers, and more all created records that may enhance our research.

Identifying a person's occupation. Sources can include but are not limited to:

- Family stories
- Obituaries
- Census
- City directories
- Photographs
- Death certificates
- Newspaper articles
- United States World War I & II Draft Cards
- Church records
- Voter registrations records

What are Occupational Records? They can include, but are not limited to:

- Ledgers
- Rosters
- Payroll
- Accident reports
- Company bulletins /newsletters
- Company photo collections
- Farm books
- Store ledgers
- Correspondence
- Doctor's ledgers
- Job applications
- Minutes
- Labor union records
- Professional organization records
- Licensing records
- Industry journals

Why seek them out? They could:

- Include supplemental information from missing vital records—ex. birth, marriage, death information
- Include personal stories
- Place a relative on a map giving you a location for further research
- Explain migration patterns
- Include photographs

Where (and how) do you find them? With work.

These first two resources I tend to use in the process of trying to understand what kinds of information exists for a location or topic.

Cyndi's List: <https://www.cyndislist.com/occupations/>

FamilySearch Wiki: https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page

- Don't ignore the possibilities in the FamilySearch Catalog either. "Occupations" is a subheading under many locations. I have found more book resources than archival collections but those could still be very helpful.

Occupational Records

These I use to try and ascertain if records still exist for a company, organization, etc.

PERSI at FindmyPast: <https://search.findmypast.com/search/periodical-source-index>

This database is a high-level index of historical and genealogical newsletters and journals compiled by the staff of the Genealogy Center at Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana. You can get citation information for articles for free but must pay for full-text articles. Login required. But all the materials are held by ACPL and can be copied or requested from there.

WorldCat: <https://www.worldcat.org/>

Combined catalog of international library catalogs. Login not required but allows for saving lists, favorite institutions. Zip code gives institutions ranked by distance.

ArchiveGrid: <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>

Similar service from same parent company as WorldCat but focused on archival collections.

GoogleBooks: <https://books.google.com/bkshp?hl=en>

Large collection of out of copyright scanned books, journals. The examples of industry journals and labor union Journals/newsletters were found here.

Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/>

Another resource for out of copyright scanned books.

Regional Archives, Libraries, and Museums—These collections won't always come up in resources like WorldCat or ArchiveGrid. Research what exists for the area, company, or industry you are researching and find out what they have.

Examples:

- Arkansas State Archives (Little Rock, Arkansas, US): <http://archives.arkansas.gov/ArkansasStateArchives/Collections>
- Archives of the Salters' Company (London, England): <https://www.salters.co.uk/>
- National Archives (Kew, England): <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/> This includes materials held at regional sites like the London Metropolitan Archives: www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma.
 - The National Archives is currently offering free digital downloads of already scanned materials while access is limited due to the pandemic.
- The Newberry (Chicago, Illinois) including Pullman Employee Records: <http://www.newberry.org/pullman-employee-records>
- Pine Bluff Jefferson County Library System: <https://www.pineblufflibrary.org/reference-research/genealogy/>
- Rockford Area Museum (Rockford, Michigan, US): <https://www.rockfordmuseum.org/> An example of a small local collection with farm books and store ledgers
- Sittingbourne Heritage Museum (Sittingbourne, England): <http://www.sittingbourne-museum.co.uk/brick-making.html>

Occupational Records

Google—Chance it. Sometimes doing a Google search on an odd name, occupation and location combined, or company will produce fabulous results.

Examples:

Both offering information on Mardon, Son & Hall of Bristol, branch of the Imperial Tobacco Company:

- Grace's Guide to British Industrial History: https://gracesguide.co.uk/Main_Page
- The World of Plying Cards: <https://www.wopc.co.uk/>

Keep in mind...

There's no way I can cover every possible occupation and some occupations can be a presentation in and of themselves (ex. Railroad records, military records)—but I'm hoping this presentation will help encourage attendees to brainstorm the possibilities with their own subjects.

Know the community. What's the major industry in the area in which your families reside? Coal country, timberlands, coastal port, farming community?

"Family Business"—Look at the occupations and workplaces of family members as well. Whole families may work in a single industry or in various jobs for a common company. Also, the records of family members may give hints to the person you are more focused on.

Records may not exist, but it's worth trying to find out whether that is the case or not—especially when trying to work around brick walls.

And while records may not exist, business information, can also play out in newspapers. Look for meeting minutes, advertisements, local columns, licensing lists, etc.

More Resources

A couple more databases to try—they're accessibility is a bit more complicated as they were first only available through universities and have somewhat allowed for private researchers. Both have scanned books, journals:

Hathi Trust: <https://www.hathitrust.org/>

Jstor: <https://www.jstor.org/>

Sample Collections

Applications for medical licenses, 1788-1848 (Lower Canada):
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/513100>

Occupational Records

London, England, Freedom of the City Admission Papers, 1681-1930:

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2052/>

Peddlers and Show Licenses, 1852-1866 [Decatur County, Georgia]:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/217747>

UK, Register of Duties Paid for Apprentices' Indentures, 1710-1811:

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1851/>

U.S., Baseball Questionnaires, 1945-2005:

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61599/>

Wisconsin, Employment Records, 1903-1988 (US)—one needed a license for watchmaking, education, barbering and boxing:

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/61705/>

Woman's Committee of Council of National Defense Cards:

<https://grpl.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16055coll5>

Sample Books

Baszile, Natalie. *We Are Each Other's Harvest: Celebrating African American Farmers, Land, and Legacy*. New York: Amistad an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2021.

Bristol Jr., Douglas Walter, *Knights of the Razor: Black Barbers in Slavery and Freedom*.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. 2009

Index to records of marks & brands: Book B, April 22, 1861-February 15, 1927, Bradley County, Arkansas. Crossett, Ark.: Nowlin Printing, 1995.

More questions? Contact me!

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Genie Road Trip: <https://genieroadtrip.com/>