

## Occupations of Our Ancestors

### [Video Link](#)

I thought it would be fun to dive into the occupations of our ancestors and how they can guide your family tree research. While many of our ancestors might be labeled as simple farmers or laborers, there is a treasure trove of information to uncover beyond those basic occupations found in census records. Have you ever come across intriguing job titles like "Slasher" or "Spinner"? Well, we are about to unravel some of the mysteries behind our ancestors' occupations.



Occupations are like puzzle pieces that help us tie records together. Imagine you have two records with people sharing the same name. Their occupation could be the key to confirming that you have the right person on another record. I have stumbled upon a diverse range of occupations during my research, some straightforward, and others not so much. For instance, have you ever wondered what a "Fuller" was? A Fuller was someone who worked with fabric, increasing its weight and bulk through processes like shrinking, beating, and pressing.

Let us take a journey through time and explore some fascinating vocations. While some may seem obvious to the experienced researcher, others may be new to you.

### OCCUPATIONS

Here are some examples of occupations you might find in records:

- **Blacksmith:** Masters of iron and metalwork, including horseshoes.
- **Chain Carrier:** Noted in land documents during the surveying. Not always a full-time occupation.
- **Cobblers:** Skilled shoemakers.
- **Cooper:** Crafters of barrels, casks, and containers.
- **Collier:** Coal Miner or Coal Merchant
- **Chandler:** Making and selling candles.
- **Constable:** Typically, a small-town police officer with limited authority.
- **Distiller:** Producing distilled spirits.
- **Dyer:** Coloring fabrics using natural dyes.
- **Farrier:** Caring for equine hooves and shoeing horses.
- **Furrier:** Dealing with furs and pelts.
- **Hayward:** Overseeing fences and gates, responsible for cattle.
- **Land Surveyor:** Measuring and mapping land.
- **Loom Operator:** Operating weaving looms.
- **Lumberjack:** Cutting down trees and preparing timber.



- **Mason:** Working with stone or brick to build structures.
- **Miller:** Masters of grinding grains into flour.
- **Miner:** Extracting minerals and ores from the earth.
- **Minstrel:** Entertaining with music and storytelling.
- **Nailsmith:** Crafting nails by hand.
- **Nursemaid:** Taking care of children and infants.
- **Potter:** Shaping clay into pottery and ceramics.
- **Priests or Religious Leaders:** Guiding their communities spiritually.
- **Peddler:** Traveling salespeople, bringing goods to communities.
- **Rural Route Carrier:** That's a fancy term for a mail carrier.
- **Scullery Maid:** Washing dishes and kitchen chores.
- **Silversmith:** Crafting items from silver.
- **Tinsmith:** Crafting items from tinplate.
- **Vintner:** Selling wine and spirits.
- **Wagoner:** Driving wagons for transportation.
- **Wainwright:** Skilled craftsmen who made wagons and carts, also known as **Cartwrights**.
- **Wool Carder:** Preparing wool fibers for spinning.

Wagoner's Shop



*1 <https://wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM101218>*

The intriguing part is that these occupations weave your ancestors' stories together. Many of these jobs were passed down through generations.

Did you know that some surnames actually originated from these jobs? While it is not a guaranteed indicator, it is fascinating if you find a "Blacksmith" in your "Smith" lineage or a "Tailor" in your "Taylor" family line.

So, why should you care about your ancestors' occupations? Well, they help link records, providing valuable context to your family history.

## FINDING OCCUPATIONS

Census records are gold mines, offering insights into your ancestors' lives. City directories, trade associations, railroad worker records, newspaper ads, mortuary records, and obituaries can all provide clues to their occupations.

But discovering the occupation is just the beginning. Understanding the context in which they worked brings their stories to life.

Let us take the case of David Coleman, a “Slasher” in a cotton mill in Guilford County, NC. A quick Google search revealed that a Slasher was a crucial part of the cotton textile manufacturing process. The machine he worked applied starch to threads before they were dried, a pivotal step in the manufacturing chain.

Further research unveiled that being a Slasher was a tough, hot job, particularly in the scorching summers of North Carolina. Historian L. McKay Whatley's document on Cotton Textile Manufacturing Process shed light on the harsh conditions these workers faced in [this article](#) about the cotton industry in North Carolina.

David Coleman's wife was a Spinner. This occupation also played a crucial role in the cotton industry. Cotton-spinning machinery transformed prepared cotton roving into usable yarn or thread, revolutionizing mass production during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Did you know that these occupations can provide context for your family history? Think about entire neighborhoods working for the same company, as revealed in census records. Picture streets filled with workers' families, living in the shadow of manufacturing giants like textile industries and steel mills. Look for manufacturing neighborhoods by searching multiple pages

Occupation	Industry
None	
Spooler	Cotton Mill
Labourer	Cotton Mill
None	
None	
Spooler	Cotton Mill
Weaver	Cotton Mill
None	
Warper	Cotton Mill
Spooler	Cotton Mill
None	
None	
Slasher	Cotton Mill
Spinner	Cotton Mill

Further research revealed that David and his wife married after their employment began at the same cotton factory means that this couple likely met while on the job or in the cotton mill housing neighborhood where they both lived. A great detail for the family story.

## Do the Research into the Occupations of Your Ancestors

So, how can you dig deeper into your ancestors' occupations? Beyond census records, you might find gold in agricultural schedules, trade associations, journals, newsletters, and city directories

### Find the Definitions

Google can be your best friend in finding more information about your ancestors occupations... but even books like the "[Dictionary of Old Occupations](#)" by Paul Jack Hewitt or "[Ancestry's Concise Genealogical Dictionary](#)."

### That is a Wrap

Let us honor the social and economic achievements of American workers, including our ancestors. By researching and documenting their labor efforts, we weave the details into a great family story. Remember, your ancestors' stories are waiting to be discovered, and their occupations are a fascinating thread in the fabric of your family history. Get it... some cotton mill humor (pun intended). 😊

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