

**Kentucky Genealogical Society**  
Presentation on Researching Occupational Records  
September 30, 2024  
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Handout

Locating our ancestors' occupations helps to understand them better and their role in society, fill in holes in our trees, and enhance our stories about them. The following lays out ways to learn what our ancestors did for a living and whether those occupations may have generated paper records.

A useful tool in this endeavor is a glossary of arcane occupations: [http://www.capitalareagenealogy.org/page\\_96f.htm](http://www.capitalareagenealogy.org/page_96f.htm) (Capital Area Genealogical Society, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Glossary of Terms, OLD TIME OCCUPATIONS).

Sources to Research Occupations

1. Personal records (*e.g.*, papers, stories, old photographs, histories)
2. Federal Census Records<sup>2</sup>
3. Non-Population Census Schedules (Note: Duke University has the original manuscript of Kentucky's Agricultural Schedules (1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880), Manufacturers Schedule (1820, 1880), and Industry Schedules (1850, 1860, 1870)).
4. City Directions (most libraries have copies). See also <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1276/>.
5. House (aka crisscross) Directories
6. Draft Registrations (Civil War, WWI, WWII)
7. Newspapers (especially obituaries and death notices)
8. Ship Manifests (especially in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)
9. Passport Applications
10. Death Certificates
11. Marriage records

Occupations with Possible Paper Records

1. Apprentices<sup>3</sup>
  - Young, inexperienced workers under contract to work for a period. Contract recorded at local level like a land contract so look for records at county level.

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<sup>2</sup> See attachment for a compilation of census terms and abbreviations related to occupations.

<sup>3</sup> Much of the information in this and the following section was compiled by Peggy Lautizen and presented at a webinar on March 26, 2024. It is available to members at <https://kygs.org/wp-content/uploads/Apprentices-Indentured-Servants-and-Redemptioners-Peggy-Lauritzen.pdf>.

- Potential apprentices: minor “orphans” (possibly a parent alive) or illegitimate children.
  - FSL has collection of apprenticeship documents from PA and VA. Also check out [FamilySearch.org/ Catalog/\[individual county\]](http://FamilySearch.org/Catalog/[individual county]).
2. Indentured servants
    - An unfree laborer under contract for a period of times, usually seven years.
    - The contract was written in duplicate on same sheet then separated with a jagged edge. Later the two edges would fit together perfectly. (Toothed edge = inDENTURE.)
    - British indentured servants had laws to protect them.
    - All others negotiated their contracts before they could get off the ship. More than half of early German-speaking immigrants (redemptioners) came this way.
    - Approximately 350,000 to 500,000 indentured servants were brought to America before Revolution.
  3. Former slaves: After the Civil War, the Freedmen’s Bureau documented labor, apprenticeship and indenture contracts in the South. See <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau>.
  4. Railroads
    - a. Many railroads published newsletters which contain employee information.<sup>4</sup>
    - b. US Railroad Retirement Board’s pension records contain copies of employees’ death certificates.
    - c. The South Suburban Genealogical Society in South Holland, IL has indexed nearly a million Pullman Co. records from 1900-1949. See <https://ssghs.org/tools-resources/pullman-employee-records/>
    - d. The University of Louisville has digitized L&N RR magazines (1859-1982). See <https://archivescatalog.library.louisville.edu/repositories/2/resources/253>
  5. Labor Unions
    - a. Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University (Detroit) has the largest labor archives in North America. See <https://guides.lib.wayne.edu/c.php?g=225395&p=1774253>.
    - b. University of Maryland has a collection which includes the AFL-CIO records and personal papers of union leaders. See <https://www.lib.umd.edu/collections/special/labor>
  6. Federal Employees
    - a. The Official Register of the United States produced every two years in conjunction with the sitting of each new Congress.

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<sup>4</sup> RR companies stopped publishing in-house magazines in early 1980. Thanks to Charles H. Bogart, Frankfort, RR historian and author of many RR books, especially railroads in Kentucky, and fellow alumnus of Thomas More University, Ft. Mitchell, for this information.

- b. Contains comprehensive listings of all civilian, military, and naval employees, officers, and agents of the federal government from 1817 to 1959.
  - c. Carried by major libraries and NARA. See <https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center/civilian-personnel>.
- 7. Military Records
  - a. Draft registrations, pension, service records
  - b. See [www.Fold3.com](http://www.Fold3.com) (fee-based).
- 8. Civilian Conservation Corps
  - a. Between 1933-1942, 2.5 million workers participated, building bridges and roads and planting trees.
  - b. Lived in 4,500 camps; received \$30/mo. and had to send \$25 home.
  - c. Colorado State Archives has a statewide CCC enrollment index: <https://archives.colorado.gov/collections/history/ccc-records>
  - d. Employment records can be found at NARA National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis. You can fill out a research request but try to collect as much information first.
- 9. State and local employees
- 10. Occupational licenses (*e.g.*, peddler, saloonkeepers)
- 11. Professional licenses (*e.g.*, medicine, law, education)
- 12. Litigation or bankruptcy documents

#### 2024 Addition to Ancestry.com's Collection: Guinness Brewery Records

Guinness meticulously preserved records of thousands of individual employee files since its founding in 1759, including potential family connections once thought lost.

In 1922, as most genealogists know, a major archive in Dublin was set on fire during the Civil War, destroying over seven centuries of census records and other historical documents. Fortunately, Guinness Brewery has meticulously preserved thousands of individual employee files since its founding in 1759, including potential family connections once thought lost.

Check out: **Ireland, Guinness Employee Records, 1799-1939**,  
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/62561/>

## Attachment

# Census Terms and Abbreviations Related to Occupations

- Ap: apprentice
- Asst: assistant
- Bar: bartender
- Bboy, Bgirl: bound boy, bound girl
- Cha: chamber maid
- Coa: coachman
- Dla: day laborer
- Dom: domestic
- DW: dishwasher
- E: employee
- En: engineer
- Fa.W: farm worker
- Fi: fireman
- G: works for a branch of government
- Go: governess
- HK: takes care of a house for pay
- H: takes care of her/his own house full-time
- HH: hired hand
- He: herder
- Lab: laborer
- Man: manager
- Meth: Methodist clergy
- NP: works for no pay for family member
- Nu: nurse
- O: "own account" (self-employed)
- O.S.P: Old School Presbyterian clergy
- P: works for private employer
- Ph: physician
- Por: porter
- P.E. Protestant Episcopal clergy
- Pri: principal
- R.C.: Roman Catholic clergy
- Sa: sailor
- Sal: sales lady
- Se: servant
- Su: superintendent
- Telph: telephone
- Trav: traveling
- U: unable to work
- W or Wk: wage or salary worker
- Wai: waitress
- Wt: waiter
- Wkm: workman