



Down on the Farm, Back to Our Roots

Sue Lisk looks at resources to help you learn about your ancestors' farm-related experiences

IN ANSWER TO MY QUESTION AS TO WHAT HE WAS LIKE, SHE SAID disparagingly, “Well, he’s just a typical farmer, you know.” I wondered what that was supposed to mean. I knew that many farmers were surprisingly good meteorologists, but other than that, I couldn’t assign them to any predefined category. Nor did I want to. But I did consider many I’d met to be the salt of the earth.



Plowing on the prairie beyond the Mississippi, c. 1868. (Library of Congress)

As family historians, we know that if we look back far enough in time, we’ll find that most of our ancestors were farmers of one sort or another. In the early censuses, “farmer” was certainly the most commonly listed occupation. And even many who were not large-scale farmers grew vegetables and fruit on smaller plots of land.

You might consider reviewing some of the websites that follow to learn more about some of your ancestors’ farm-related experiences in the U.S. and Canada.

Gleanings from U.S. Agriculture Schedules

In her article, “Did My Ancestor’s Farm Prosper or Fail?”, author Lisa Lisson views the U.S. Agriculture Schedules as a valuable source of information about our ancestor’s farms, as well as a tool to use for other genealogical purposes. You’ll find her discussion at https://news.legacyfamilytree.com/legacy_news/2015/07/using-the-agricultural-schedules-in-your-genealogy-research.html.

The Agriculture Schedules that formed part of the U.S. Federal Censuses for 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 have survived. If you have a subscription to Ancestry.com, you’ll be able to access some of these agriculture schedules for nineteen states and Washington Territory. You’ll find the collection via the Card Catalog under the title, “U.S., Selected Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850 – 1880”. You can search each schedule for your ancestors via a number of search criteria or browse the schedules by state, year and county. Ancestry.com offers only some of these agriculture schedules for the states listed.

As Lisa explains, even for the areas and years represented, you won’t find all farms on these