

People at Work

How do Iowans work to provide for themselves, their families and their communities?

Every family needs a source of income to pay for essentials like food, clothing and housing. Most Iowans earn a salary or the profits from their business or services. Certain groups receive support from retirement funds or government programs in health care or public assistance. But it is safe to say that most Iowans work for a living. Recent government figures shows that some 1.6 million Iowans are currently in the work force.

Early 20th Century Jobs

The jobs Iowans have done have changed over the past 120 years. In 1900, a majority of Iowans lived on farms. Without the large-scale machinery we have today, farmers rarely managed over a half acre (320 acres) because it took too much time to plant, cultivate and harvest the crops. Most farm families, however, raised livestock for sale, milked cows for butter and their home use, and kept flocks of chickens for the eggs and meat. They also planted large gardens and canned vegetables for the winter. The husband and wife worked together on the farm as a team, each responsible for his or her own parts of the operation. Children learned farming and housekeeping from their parents and became an important part of the successful operation.

Cities and towns offered many manufacturing jobs in agricultural equipment and meat packing. There were many small coal mines that attracted immigrants from countries Italy, Croatia, Sweden and Wales. However, as railroads began shifting away from coal to diesel fuel and coal sources became depleted, the coal industry had all but disappeared by the 1940s.

Shift from Agriculture to Other Sectors

World War II brought a surge of industrial jobs to the state as the government needed supplies to fight the war. Farm machinery plants shifted to war equipment and smaller factories turned out ammunition. Meat packing continued to be an important source of factory work.

As farm machinery became bigger and more powerful, farmers could manage larger and larger operations. This, of course, meant that there were fewer farms and fewer farm families. Iowa cities began growing with the rise of manufacturing and financial occupations like insurance. Des Moines is one of the two largest centers for insurance in the nation. Education and health care are two more important sectors in the Iowa employment picture. Colleges and universities saw rapid growth after World War II with the GI Bill, making it possible for many more young people to afford college and Baby Boomers swelling the ranks of college-age youth.

The late 20th century saw a revolution in communication with the introduction of computers and cell phones. The first computer was invented by John Atanasoff at Iowa State University. Robert Noyes, a graduate of Grinnell College, did pioneering work in the development of microchips which did much to make the computer revolution possible. While there was a decline in some areas of manufacturing toward the end of the century and a continued decline in farm employment, computers sparked the growth of new industries. Wind and solar energy also began needing workers to build, install and maintain clean energy equipment. Government saw an expansion at all levels with the growth of regulation and support programs.

To provide Iowan with the training they need to fill positions in today's job market, the state created a system of community colleges geared to job training programs. The state also began investing in work placement programs to match workers with job openings. Today, Iowa has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation. Unfortunately, many jobs in the service and health care areas pay wages so low that workers struggle to meet their expenses even if they work full time.

Education is a critical factor in the employment picture. Many high schools offer job-training classes and coordinate

curriculum with nearby universities and community colleges. The state itself is critically invested in producing and supporting a skilled labor force that allows Iowans to work and support families here.

About the Source Set

The first two supporting questions list the [top five occupations](#) self-reported by Iowans (by gender) in 1900 and 1950. This information was compiled by Willis Goudy, a professor of sociology at Iowa State University, who published this chart in his 2008 book, *Iowa's Numbers: 150 Years of Decennial Census Data With a Glance to the Future*. The third supporting question looks at how occupations changed over time in regard to sex and cultural norms.

Supporting Questions

How did Iowans make a living to support their families and communities in 1900 according to census records?

- **Men**

- [1. Farmer Plowing with a Two-Horse Team, ca. 1900 \(Image\)](#)
- [2. Man Feeding Pigs in the Barnyard, ca. 1895 \(Image\)](#)
- [3. Farm Laborers Gathering Potatoes in Fort Bend County, Texas, 1909 \(Image\)](#)
- [4. Men Outside the Des Moines Brick Company, ca. 1900 \(Image\)](#)
- [5. W.H. Waers Grocery Store in Des Moines, ca. 1895 \(Image\)](#)

- **Women**

- [1. House Maid, between 1900 and 1920 \(Image\)](#)
- [2. Teacher with Pupils of Washington School in Boston, Massachusetts, October 1909 \(Image\)](#)
- [3. Dressmaker Angelina Guinzali in Boston, Massachusetts, January 25, 1917 \(Image\)](#)
- [4. Mountain Milk Maids, ca. 1900 \(Image\)](#)
- [5. Cook in White House Kitchen, ca. 1890 \(Image\)](#)

How did Iowans make a living to support their families and communities in 1950 according to census records?

- **Men**

- [1. Elias Eliason Cultivating Corn in Kanawa, Iowa, 1949 \(Image\)](#)
- [2. Farm Laborers in Fort Dodge, Iowa, August 1957 \(Image\)](#)
- [3. Two Men Working on a Maytag Washing Machine in Newton, Iowa, October 1949 \(Image\)](#)
- [4. Construction Workers at Mercy Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, July 1957 \(Image\)](#)
- [5. Salesman Selling a Hat to a Customer in Chicago, Illinois, April 1952 \(Image\)](#)

- **Women**

- [1. Saleswoman Arranging Figurines at J.C. Penney in Des Moines, Iowa, February 1949 \(Image\)](#)
- [2. Teacher and Students at P.S. 8 in New York, January 1943 \(Image\)](#)
- [3. Secretary Betty Goodell in Clear Lake, Iowa, 1950 \(Image\)](#)
- [4. Women Working Bore Presses at Wood Brothers Plant in Des Moines, Iowa, 1955 \(Image\)](#)
- [5. Workers Harvesting Cucumbers in Muscatine Iowa, July 1959 \(Image\)](#)

How do people make a living to support their family and community in the 2000s that is different than previous eras?

- [Flight Attendant for Southwest Airlines, June 25, 2012 \(Image\)](#)
- [Second-Grade Teacher at Canaan Elementary in Patchogue, New York, June 18, 2015 \(Images\)](#)
- [Iowa Astronaut Peggy Whitson, 2017 \(Image\)](#)

[Registered Nurses, 2018 \(Images\)](#)

[Des Moines Firefighters Stand by a Fire Engine, 2019 \(Image\)](#)

[News Anchor Rheya Spigner in Des Moines, Iowa, 2019 \(Images\)](#)

[Park Ranger with Volunteers at Stone Park in Iowa, 2019 \(Images\)](#)

[Receptionist Helping a Guest at the State Historical Museum, 2019 \(Image\)](#)

[State Historical Society of Iowa Librarian Helping a Patron, 2019 \(Images\)](#)

[U.S. Senator Joni Ernst from Iowa, 2019 \(Images\)](#)

[*Printable Image and Document Guide](#)

Additional Resources

[Photo Collection: Top Ten Occupations for Men in Iowa \(1900 to 2000\)](#)

This document features images of the top 10 occupations self-reported by Iowans who identified as male for 1900, 1950 and 2000.

[Photo Collection: Top Ten Occupations for Women in Iowa \(1900-2000\)](#)

This document features images of the top 10 occupations self-reported by Iowans who identified as female for 1900, 1950 and 2000.

[Distribution of Iowa's Urban Population Map, 1930](#)

This map was created by the State Planning Board of Iowa's Committee on Population Social Trends in 1930. It shows which of Iowa's 99 counties have more urban areas and which counties have more rural areas. In 1930, the United States Census Bureau defined "urban" as having a population of 2,500 or more. This map is intended to be used with the "State Map of County and City Maps, 2018" in order to show growth over time.

[Evolution of the Maytag Wringer Washer](#)

This webpage features a timeline of photos showing the evolution of the Maytag Wringer Washer. This additional resource connects to the laundress in the 1900s and the manufacturing operative in the 1950s.

["In the Millinery Shop" from *The Goldfinch*, November 1986](#)

This article appeared in the November 1986 edition of *The Goldfinch: Iowa History for Young People*. It tells about the occupation of millinery and features quotes from Elizabeth Wright Heller who sold hats in 1880 at Mrs. Ann Swezey's millinery shop in Marengo, Iowa along with other milliners and customers.

["Iowa: a State of Work," from *The Goldfinch*, 1996](#)

Amy Roth wrote this article for the Summer 1996 edition of *The Goldfinch: Iowa History for Young People*. This article explains different eras of work in Iowa over time, including in agriculture and manufacturing.

[Multiple Graphs, Charts and Graphics Featuring Iowa's Population and Occupation](#)

Willis Goudy, a professor of sociology at Iowa State University, published his 2008 book, "Iowa's Numbers: 150 Years of Decennial Census Data With a Glance to the Future." Multiple charts and graphs from the book and other sources are looking at Iowa's population and popular occupation in rural and urban areas in this additional resource.

["My Next Move" Website](#)

The "My Next Move" website is a searchable collection of careers hosted by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration.

Additional Resources continued

[“Threshing on the Farm” from Living History Farms](#)

This Living History Farms webpage tells the story of the Wood Brothers Factory and contains video clips on how a Wood Brothers Steam Engine and threshing machine worked. This additional resource connects to the manufacturing operative and farm laborer in the 1950s.

[“Who Worked Where?” from *The Goldfinch*, 1996](#)

This excerpt from *The Goldfinch: Iowa History for Young People* includes a mapping activity to meet standard SS.1.16. and connect with this unit of study about work.

Farmer Plowing with a Two-Horse Team, ca. 1900



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Larson, Andrew Orm, ca. 1900

Description

#1 Occupation: Farmer

In 1900, Iowa was all about farming. From about the 1850s to 1880s, people had recently moved to the state and either bought land at a very good price (\$1.25 an acre) or signed up for 160 acres for free through the Homestead Act. By 1900, Iowa land sold for about \$20 per acre. Andrew Orm Larson took this photograph of a hard-working Iowa farmer out plowing in preparation for planting the next crop.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for this farmer?
- What skills does this farmer need in order to be successful at his job?

Man Feeding Pigs in the Barnyard, ca. 1895



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, ca. 1895

Description

#2 Occupation: Farm Laborer, Member of Farm Family

Farming was a very big job around 1900, requiring lots of hours and a great deal of hard work. Farmers typically raised crops such as corn, soybeans and oats and livestock such as cows, horses, hogs and chickens. Often, many people were needed to finish all of the jobs on a farm, and many times several family members all worked together to make the farm a success. This farmer is seen with an empty bushel basket that likely carried the corn he brought to feed the hogs.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for this farm laborer?
- What skills does this farm laborer need in order to be successful at his job?
- Connect to what you already know. What do you think that a farmer did with the crops and animals they raised?

Farm Laborers Gathering Potatoes in Fort Bend County, Texas, 1909



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Schlueter, Frank J., "Gathering potatoes in Fort Bend County, Tx," 1909

Description

#3 Occupation: Farm Laborer

When farmers did not have enough help from family members, they would hire additional help. Farm laborers did the same tasks as farmers, but they did not own the farm. In this photograph, many workers are seen harvesting potatoes in a large field. Sometimes farm laborers were called "migrant laborers" because they moved from one farm to another depending on what field work was needed at that time of year.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for these farm laborers?
- What skills does this farm laborer need in order to be successful at his job?
- What machines and equipment make this job easier? How might these farmers get their potatoes to the consumers who will eat them?

Description

Schlueter, Frank J., "Gathering potatoes in Fort Bend County, Tx," 1909. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Men Outside the Des Moines Brick Company, ca. 1900



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, ca. 1900

Description

#4 Occupation: General Laborer

General laborers did many things such as make bricks, operate a saw mill, build roads, paint buildings or several other jobs. Many of these workers were called “day laborers” and hired to complete a specific job and then moved on to the next employer rather than working for the same company for many years, like people do today.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for this general laborer?
- What skills does this general laborer need in order to be successful at his job?
- How are the skills needed by this general laborer the same and different than the skills needed by a farmer?

E.J. Crane, Watchmaker and Jewelry Store, in Richmond, Virginia, 1899



Courtesy of Library of Congress, "E.J. Crane, watchmaker and jewelry store with man working in window and man standing in doorway, Richmond, Virginia," 1899

Description

#5 Occupation: Merchant (Store Owner)

Stores in 1900 were smaller than most of the stores we see today. In small towns, stores carried many kinds of products: clothes, food, wagon/machine/auto parts, dishes, tools, hats and many other items. In cities, stores specialized into a certain kind of product. The shop in this photograph features E.J. Crane, a watchmaker and jewelry store, in Richmond, Virginia.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for this store owner?
- What skills does this store owner need in order to be successful at his job?
- Why would living in a small town or living in a city impact the kinds of items that a store would have for sale?

Citation Information

"E.J. Crane, watchmaker and jewelry store with man working in window and man standing in doorway, Richmond, Virginia," 1899. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Servants in Bulloch Hall's Dining Room in Roswell, Georgia, March 27, 1907



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Paxton, William M., "The house maid," between 1900 and 1920

Description

#1 Occupation: Servant

In 1900, servants took care of the household, and sometimes, the people who lived there. Servants might dust, like the woman in this image, mop floors, tend fires, run errands and do the shopping, wash laundry and help family members with what they needed and sometimes do the cooking. Sometimes servants lived with the family they worked for, and sometimes they lived in another house away from the family. Sometimes they wore a uniform, and sometimes they did not. This photograph shows an African-American man and woman who worked in the Roosevelt family's household at Bulloch Hall in Roswell, Georgia.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a servant?
- What skills does this servant need in order to be successful at their job?
- What equipment would the individuals in the this photo use to do their job?

Citation Information

"Bulloch Hall Dining Room, Scene of Marriage of President Roosevelt's Parents," 27 March 1907. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Teacher and Students at Whittier Primary School in Hampton, Virginia, ca. 1899



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Johnston, Frances B. "Thanksgiving Day Lesson at Whittier," ca. 1899

Description

#2 Occupation: Teacher

By 1900, more and more kids in Iowa were going to school. In rural places, a one room school had many grades learning together with one teacher. In urban places, such as in this photo, a teacher had a class of students who were all in the same grade level. Teachers covered reading, writing and arithmetic and sometimes geography, needlepoint or Bible lessons. In rural areas, kids were not required by law to attend school until 1902, and many kids stayed home to help with work on the farm. This photograph shows African-American children learning about Thanksgiving in their classroom at Whittier Primary School in Hampton, Virginia.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a teacher?
- What skills does this teacher need in order to be successful at her job?
- Compare and contrast this school photo with your school. Use evidence from the photo to tell how it is the same and how it is different.

Citation Information

Johnston, Frances B. "Thanksgiving Day Lesson at Whittier," ca. 1899. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Dressmaker Angelina Guinzali in Boston, Massachusetts, January 25, 1917



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Hine, Lewis W., "Angelina Guinzali (15 years old?) works for Madame Ball, dressmaker at 603 Boylston Street. Location: Boston, Massachusetts / Lewis W. Hine.," 25 January 1917

Description

#3 Occupation: Dressmaker

As fashions became more elaborate and railroad systems made them more available throughout the United States, dressmakers transitioned from sewing by hand to using a sewing machine. Angelina Guinzali, seen in this photo, is about 15 years old and worked as a dressmaker for Madame Ball, a dressmaker in Boston, Massachusetts.

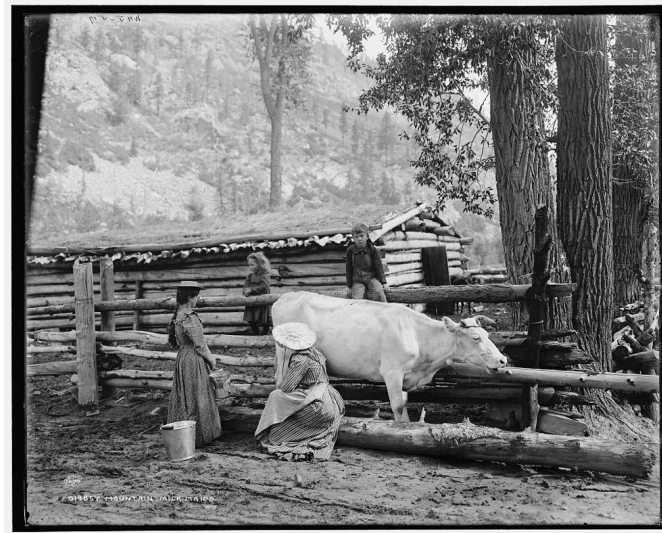
Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a dressmaker?
- What skills does this dressmaker need in order to be successful at her job?
- Using evidence from the photo, what equipment is available for this dressmaker to do her job?

Citation Information

Hine, Lewis W., "Angelina Guinzali (15 years old?) works for Madame Ball, dressmaker at 603 Boylston Street. Location: Boston, Massachusetts / Lewis W. Hine.," 25 January 1917. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Mountain Milk Maids, ca. 1900



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Jackson, William H., "Mountain milk maids," ca. 1900

Description

#4 Occupation: Farmer

Part of women's work on a frontier farm was taking care of livestock that provided food for her family. Milking was done twice a day, and then the milk had to be separated from the cream. Some farms used an icebox to keep milk and cream cold, but others used a cold spot in a nearby stream or a root cellar to keep the dairy products longer. The cow in this photo is tied to the log fence with a rope. Often it was the kids' job to bring the cow from the pasture when it was time for milking.

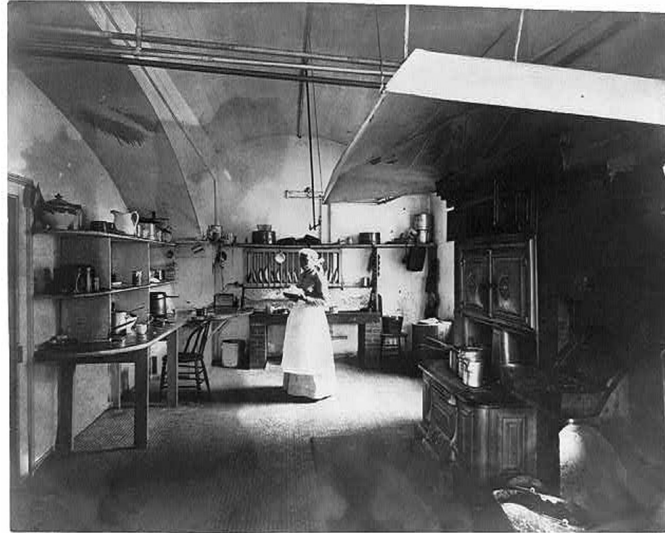
Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a farmer?
- What skills does this farmer need in order to be successful at her job?
- Connect to what you already know. What are the uses of milk and cream?

Citation Information

Jackson, William H., "Mountain milk maids," ca. 1900. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Cook in White House Kitchen, ca. 1890



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Johnston, Frances B., "Cook in White House kitchen," ca. 1890

Description

#5 Occupation: Housekeeper

In 1900, the work of housekeepers and servants probably looked very similar. In larger homes, more hired help meant that they could specialize and only do certain tasks. A housekeeper would have been in charge of taking care of the house, cleaning, decorating, repairing household items and sometimes they also were the cook. The cook, seen in this photo, is from a very famous large house: the White House in Washington, D.C. That is where the president of the United States lives.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a housekeeper?
- What skills does this housekeeper need in order to be successful at her job?
- Based on evidence from the photo, what equipment is this woman using to do her job? How is that the same and different from the kitchen at your home?

Citation Information

Johnston, Frances B., "Cook in White House kitchen," ca. 1890. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Elias Eliason Cultivating Corn in Kanawa, Iowa, 1949



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Lanthrop, 6 June 1949

Description

#1 Occupation: Farmer (owner or tenant)

In 1950, farming was still the number one occupation for men in Iowa. Advances in technology, like the one Elias Eliason is using to cultivate his corn field near Kanawha, Iowa, allowed a farmer to farm more acres of land. However, farming was hard work and risky because the success depended on the weather that season and current market prices. By 1950, many farmers were renting land and homes from people who owned the land but did not live there. Sometimes land owners, called landlords, were too old to do the hard work of being a farmer or wanted to live somewhere else. Landlords rented out their farms which especially helped beginning farmers since the price of land increased from \$20 per acre in 1900 to \$250 per acre in 1950.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a farmer?
- What skills does this farmer need in order to be successful at his job?
- Create a bar graph showing the cost of an acre of land in Iowa in 1900 compared to the cost in 1950.

Farm Laborers in Fort Dodge, Iowa, August 1957



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines Register & Tribune, August 1957

Description

#2 Occupation: Farm Laborer

These men are detasseling corn near Fort Dodge, Iowa. They are migrant workers, which means that they moved from farm to farm doing whatever job was needed at the time. They were paid an hourly wage. Farm laborers did the same jobs as farmers but did not own the land or the equipment. That means they did not have the same risks as the land owner, but they also did not get the big profits that the land owner would have in a good year.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a farm laborer?
- What skills do these farm laborers need in order to be successful at his job?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to being a farm laborer?

Two Men Working on a Maytag Washing Machine in Newton, Iowa, October 1949



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, October 1949

Description

#3 Occupation: Manufacturing Operative

The Maytag factory in Newton, Iowa, was a pillar of the community for decades. In this photograph, manufacturing operatives work on an assembly line for wringer washing machines. Factories throughout Iowa had good paying, reliable jobs that attracted many people to work off the farm. As farming became more financially risky, people appreciated the reliability of manufacturing jobs.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a manufacturing operative?
- What skills does this manufacturing operative need in order to be successful at his job?
- Are all of the manufacturing operatives in this photo men?
- Why did many Iowans leave farming to take jobs in factories?
- Make a prediction: How might the wringer washing machine have changed daily life for Iowans?

Construction Workers at Mercy Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, July 1957



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines Register & Tribune, July 1957

Description

#4 Occupation: Nonmanufacturing Laborer

Mercy Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, hired this construction company to build an addition to their building. A crane operator and dump truck driver removes excavated soil as they prepare to start the foundation for the building, which would likely be built out of sandstone or limestone. Nonmanufacturing laborers in Iowa in the 1950s did a wide variety of jobs including laying cement, painting, working at lumber mills, building roads and many more jobs.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a nonmanufacturing laborer?
- What skills does this nonmanufacturing laborer need in order to be successful at his job?
- What equipment is this nonmanufacturing laborer using to do his job?
- How do the jobs in this photograph connect with the work done by the quarryman in 1900?

Salesman Selling a Hat to a Customer in Chicago, Illinois, April 1952



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Delano, Jack, "Mr. Claude Walker trying on a new hat in the Henry C. Taylor Store for Men. The salesman is Mr. William Strong, who is manager of the store. 47th Street near State Street, Chicago, Illinois," April 1942

Description

#5 Occupation: Retail Trade Manager, Official or Proprietor

In other words, store owner or manager. Stores in the 1950s were more specialized than stores in the 1900s. In this photograph, William Strong is the manager of the Henry C. Taylor Store for Men in Chicago, and he is seen helping a customer to try on a new hat. This may seem similar to the milliner's job in the 1900s, but Strong cannot be called a milliner because he is only selling the hats, not making them.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a store owner or manager?
- What skills does this store owner or manager need in order to be successful at his job?
- Make a prediction: Why would stores be more specialized in the 1950s than in the 1900s?

Citation Information

Delano, Jack, "Mr. Claude Walker trying on a new hat in the Henry C. Taylor Store for Men. The salesman is Mr. William Strong, who is manager of the store. 47th Street near State Street, Chicago, Illinois," April 1942. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Saleswoman Arranging Figurines at J.C. Penney in Des Moines, Iowa, February 1949



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines Register & Tribune, February 1949

Description

#1 Occupation: Retail Trade Saleswoman or Sales Clerk

The J.C. Penney Company department store in Des Moines, Iowa, was a large store that arranged items into different departments. This sales clerk was arranging figurines in the glassware department. Sales clerks helped customers pick out the items they were looking for, and retail trade saleswomen helped to connect stores like the J.C. Penney Company with the factories that make the products they want to sell in their store.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a sales clerk?
- What skills does this sales clerk need in order to be successful at her job?
- How did a retail trade salesmen and a store clerk in the 1950s work to connect producers with consumers?

Teacher and Students at Wheatly Elementary School, September 16, 1957



Courtesy of Library of Congress, O'Halloran, Thomas J., "Wheatly Elem. School," 16 September 1957

Description

#2 Occupation: Teacher

By 1950, many of the one-room schools had closed and students rode school busses to a larger school building in town. Most all elementary classrooms had only one grade level of students in a classroom. Classroom teachers taught math, reading, writing, grammar, history, science and geography. This photograph shows a teacher and her students at Wheatly Elementary School in 1957.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a teacher?
- What skills does this teacher need in order to be successful at her job?
- How did the occupation of teaching change from 1900 to 1950?

Citation Information

O'Halloran, Thomas J., "Wheatly Elem. School," 16 September 1957. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

Secretary Betty Goodell in Clear Lake, Iowa, 1950



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines Register & Tribune, March 1950

Description

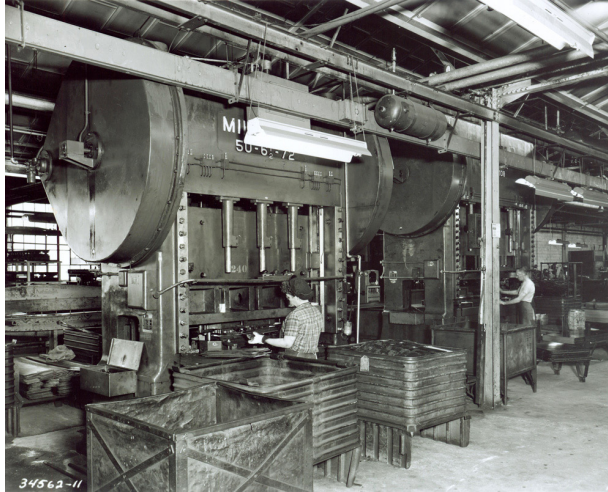
#3 Occupation: Stenographer, Typist or Secretary

As businesses grew larger and more complex, some businesses added secretaries. Secretaries would likely have typing skills but were also asked to file papers, answer phone calls, write notes, sort incoming mail and run errands. Stenographers, a special kind of typist, continued using a kind of writing called shorthand that used abbreviations and symbols to transcribe speech. Some offices had electric typewriters whose keys were easier to push. In this photo, Betty Goodell, a secretary in Clear Lake, Iowa, files records.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a secretary?
- What skills does this secretary need in order to be successful at her job?
- How did the occupation of typist change from 1900 to 1950?

Women Working Bore Presses at Wood Brothers Plant in Des Moines, Iowa, 1955



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, 1955

Description

#4 Occupation: Manufacturing Operative

During World War I and especially during World War II, many men in the United States left factory jobs to enter the military, and many women took on manufacturing operative jobs in factories. When the war was over, many women continued working in the factories. The Wood Brothers factory made threshing machines and other kinds of farming machines. During World War II, it made equipment for the war effort and then converted back to manufacturing farm machinery.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a manufacturing operative?
- What skills does this manufacturing operative need in order to be successful at her job?
- What equipment is this manufacturing operative using to do her job?
- Compare and contrast this photograph with the [Maytag factory in 1949](#). Use evidence from the photographs to explain what is the same and what is different.

Workers Harvesting Cucumbers in Muscatine Iowa, July 1959



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, July 1959

Description

#5 Occupation: Farm Laborer, Unpaid Family Worker

Many jobs on the farm, such as harvesting a large field of cucumbers for the Heinz Company near Muscatine, Iowa, required several people to do. In the 1950s, many families worked together in order to have enough help to do all of the jobs on a farm. Many farm wives were a significant part of the farming operation, and they shared in the profits that the farm made.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What is the working environment for a farm laborer?
- What skills does this farm laborer need in order to be successful at her job?
- What equipment is this farm laborer using to do her job?

Flight Attendant for Southwest Airlines, June 25, 2012



Courtesy of Departures Magazine, Lusk, Brian, "High-Style Flight Attendant Uniforms," *Departures Magazine*, 2012

Description

This photograph shows a Southwest Airlines flight attendant serving drinks during a flight.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do flight attendants need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 25 percent of flight attendants are men. What might be some reasons for this number?

Citation Information

Lusk, Brian, "High-Style Flight Attendant Uniforms," *Departures Magazine*, 25 June 2012. Courtesy of Departures Magazine

Second-Grade Teacher at Canaan Elementary in Patchogue, New York, June 18, 2015



Courtesy of NPR, Gregory, Christopher, "One Teacher's Quest To Build Language Skills ... And Self-Confidence," National Public Radio (NPR), 18 June 2015

Description

These photographs show Thomas Whaley working with his second-grade students as they learn English throughout the year. Whaley is shown in his classroom at Canaan Elementary in Patchogue, New York.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do teachers need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 11 percent of elementary teachers are men. What might be some reasons for this number?

Citation Information

Gregory, Christopher, "One Teacher's Quest To Build Language Skills ... And Self-Confidence," National Public Radio (NPR), 18 June 2015. Courtesy of NPR

Receptionist Helping a Guest at the State Historical Museum, 2019



Courtesy of State Historical Museum of Iowa, 2019

Description

These photographs show the State Historical Museum of Iowa receptionist Brain Trotter. Trotter is shown helping a visitor check in at the museum.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do receptionists need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 10 percent of receptionists are men. What might be some reasons for this number?

Registered Nurses, 2018



Courtesy of Blake K. Smith, American Association for Men in Nursing, 2018

Description

These photos from the American Association for Men in Nursing (AAMN) show registered male nurses posing for a photo and performing for some patients. The demand for more male nurses is on the rise, and AAMN are campaigning for a 20 percent increase in the number of male nurses in the workforce by 2020.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do nurses need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 9 percent of nurses are men. What might be some reasons for this number?

Citation Information

American Association for Men in Nursing, 2018. Courtesy of Blake K. Smith

State Historical Society of Iowa Librarian Helping a Patron, 2019



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa and Bruce Kreuger, 2019

Description

Librarian Bruce Kreuger from the State Historical Society of Iowa is shown working with a patron to help her with a research project.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do librarians need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 17 percent of librarians are men. What might be some reasons for this number?

Des Moines Firefighters Stand by a Fire Engine, 2019



Courtesy of the Des Moines Fire Department, 2019

Description

This image shows four Des Moines firefighters standing by a fire engine. Shown left to right: Engineer Kerri Przybylski, Fire Station 10; Senior Medic Nadine Sechovec, Fire Station 4; Senior Medic Laura Lyons, EMS Section; and Firefighter Danielle Edwards, Fire Station 5.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do firefighters need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 4 percent of firefighters are women. What might be some reasons for this number?

Citation Information

Des Moines Fire Department, 2019. Courtesy of the Des Moines Fire Department

Iowa Astronaut Peggy Whitson, 2017



Courtesy of NASA, Peggy Whitson Official EMU Portrait, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), 2017

Description

Peggy A. Whitson participated in ten spacewalks. With a total of 665 days in space, Whitson holds the U.S. record, placing eighth on the all-time space endurance list. The Iowa native also completed two six-month tours of duty aboard the space station in 2002, and as the station commander in 2008. She accumulated 377 days in space between the two missions, the most for any U.S. woman at the time of her return to Earth.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do astronauts need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 8 percent of U.S. astronauts are women. What might be some reasons for this number?

Citation Information

Peggy Whitson Official EMU Portrait, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), 2017. Courtesy of NASA

News Anchor Rheya Spigner in Des Moines, Iowa, 2019



Courtesy of KCCI Des Moines, Hearst Television, 2019

Description

These photographs feature KCCI news anchor Rheya Spigner in Des Moines, Iowa. Spigner is the third anchor on KCCI 8 News This Morning, and she also anchors traffic in the morning and KCCI 8 News at Noon.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do reporters need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 25 percent of news anchors in the U.S. are women. What might be some reasons for this number?

Citation Information

Hearst Television, 2019. Courtesy of KCCI Des Moines

Park Ranger with Volunteers at Stone Park in Iowa, 2019



Courtesy of Brianna Martens, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 2019

Description

Park Manager Brianna Martens, front left with shovel, works with volunteers from the Friends of Stone Park in Iowa to build and reinforce water bars (erosion prevention) on the Mt. Lucia Trail in Stone State Park.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do park managers need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 40 percent of park managers are women. What might be some reasons for this number?

Citation Information

Martens, Brianna, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 2019. Courtesy of Brianna Martens

U.S. Senator Joni Ernst from Iowa, 2019



Courtesy of the Office of Senator Joni Ernst, 2019

Description

These photographs showcase U.S. Senator Joni Ernst of Iowa. One shows Ernst visiting with employees at Performance Pipe in Davis County on August 13, 2019. This was part of Ernst's 99 county tour in 2019. She was the first female U.S. senator elected from Iowa.

Source-Dependent Questions

- What do senators need to be good at their job?
- How is this job the same as jobs in the 1900 and 1950? How is it different?
- About 25 percent of United States Senators are women. What might be some reasons for this number?

Citation Information

Office of Senator Joni Ernst, 2019. Courtesy of the Office of Senator Joni Ernst

“Ten Most Frequently Listed Occupations by Sex, Iowa, 1900-2000,” 2008

96 Iowa's Numbers

Table 11.9 Ten Most Frequently Listed Occupations by Sex, Iowa, 1900-2000

Year and Occupations of Females		Year and Occupations of Males	
Year	Number	Year	Number
1900		1900	
Teacher	29,315	Farm laborer (member of family)	222,160
Domestic worker	16,042	Farm laborer	87,171
Housekeeper	10,061	General laborer	66,414
Laundress	6,751	Merchant or dealer	19,481
Milliner	5,251	Carpenter or joiner	18,780
Landlady	4,647	Dayman, stevedore, or seaman	12,129
Milliner	3,581	Seaman	11,592
Manicurist or worker of manicure paraphernalia or toilet	1,936	Mixer or quarryman	11,078
1910		1910	
Teacher	24,087	Farmer	276,346
Domestic worker	22,088	Farm laborer	124,651
Housekeeper	11,122	Retail dealer	28,761
Laundress	9,516	Bookbinding or hand-trade laborer	25,026
Milliner	5,256	Carpenter	19,911
Landlady	5,041	Railroad transportation laborer	17,209
Milliner	4,532	Cook	15,092
Farmer	4,546	Seaman	11,774
Farm laborer	4,083	Dayman, stevedore, or seaman	8,883
Milliner or millinery dealer	3,498	Electrician, painter, varnisher, or stuccoer	5,016
1920		1920	
Teacher	21,907	Farmer	295,441
Domestic worker	17,041	Farm laborer	102,228
Housekeeper	9,845	Retail proprietor	25,112
Laundress	8,285	Carpenter	18,821
Milliner	6,115	Building or general laborer	17,821
Landlady	5,555	Railroad transportation laborer	12,819
Domestic worker	4,706	Cook	12,609
Milliner	4,397	Clerk (except in stores)	11,911
Telephone operator	3,793	Machinist, tool-die maker, or toolmaker	6,786
1930		1930	
Teacher	26,349	Farm laborer (owner or tenant)	201,349
Domestic worker	21,441	Farm laborer (wage)	167,254
Housekeeper	11,755	Retail dealer	31,675
Laundress	11,507	Seaman	28,214
Milliner	8,926	Farm laborer (except family workers)	26,911
Landlady	8,285	Building or general laborer	26,711
Domestic worker	7,531	Bookbinding or hand-trade laborer	14,974
Milliner	5,815	Carpenter	14,549
Landlady	5,275	Charlton, truck or tractor driver	13,788
Telephone operator	4,911	Clerk (except in stores)	11,512
Farm laborer (owner or tenant)	4,706	Machinist	
1940		1940	
Teacher	22,003	Farmer (owner or tenant)	203,003
Domestic worker	19,003	Farm laborer (wage)	162,003
Housekeeper	10,003	Seaman	40,332
Laundress	11,800	Farm laborer (except family workers)	31,226
Milliner	8,827	Retail trade manager, official, or proprietor	27,505
Landlady	8,779	Classifier, driver, or deliveryman	19,774
Domestic worker	7,364	Manufacturing operator	17,463
Telephone operator	7,364	Nonmanufacturing laborer	14,355
Milliner	4,945	Mechanic or repairman	13,561
Telephone operator	4,945	Machinist	
1950		1950	
Teacher	22,608	Farmer (owner or tenant)	196,249
Domestic worker	19,222	Farm laborer (wage)	164,814
Housekeeper	10,940	Manufacturing operator	31,001
Laundress	14,742	Nonmanufacturing laborer	29,018
Milliner	11,610	Retail trade manager, official, or proprietor	24,870
Landlady	11,546	Truck or tractor driver	22,547
Domestic worker	8,251	Farm laborer (except family workers)	22,547
Clerk (except private household)	6,975	Retail trade salesman or sales clerk	16,736
Telephone operator	6,975	Carpenter	

Courtesy of Iowa State University, Goudy, Willis, “Table 2.1 Population, Iowa and the United States, 1850-2000,” pp. 5, *Iowa's Numbers: 150 Years of Decennial Census Data With a Glance to the Future*, 2008

Description

Willis Goudy, a professor of sociology at Iowa State University, published this chart in his 2008 book, *Iowa's Numbers: 150 Years of Decennial Census Data With a Glance to the Future*. This chart lists the number of Iowans who self-reported their occupation as one of the top ten occupations in the United States Census, which is taken every 10 years. This chart was used as the guide for creating the occupations featured and analyzed in this source set.

[Transcript of “Ten Most Frequently Listed Occupations by Sex, Iowa, 1900-2000” Graph](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- How many of the top occupations for males and females in 1900 had to do with farming? In 1950? In 2000? What does that tell us about farming in Iowa?
- How many of the top occupations for males and females in 1900 had to do with manufacturing? In 1950? In 2000? What does that tell us about manufacturing in Iowa?
- How many of the top occupations for males and females in 1900 had to do with retail (stores)? In 1950? In 2000? What does that tell us about jobs in retail in Iowa?

Citation Information

Goudy, Willis, “Table 11.9: Ten Most Frequently Listed Occupations by Sex, Iowa, 1900-2000,” pp. 96-97, *Iowa's Numbers: 150 Years of Decennial Census Data With a Glance to the Future*, 2008. Courtesy of Iowa State University