

# Occupations in 1860

BY DAVID WALBERT

By the middle of the 1800s, the U.S. Census Bureau was asking more information about the people of each state and their economic production. Beginning in 1840, census takers asked people their occupations. The lists below show the occupations that free North Carolinians reported in the Census of 1860.

## Short list

In the 1920s, historian Guion Griffis Johnson grouped North Carolinians' occupations into several categories. She explains:

Dairymen, nurserymen, and overseers have been placed in the farmer group; farm hands, day laborers, laundresses, servants, teamsters, apprentices, drivers, and those similarly employed have been placed in the laborer group; those who followed a craft, such as cooper, blacksmith, carpenter, have been classified as tradesmen; physicians, teachers, lawyers, engineers, public officials, and the like have been classified as professional workers; grocers, druggists, innkeepers, traders, bankers, and the like have been placed in the merchant group; clerks, bookkeepers, collectors, and those of similar employment have been classified as white-collar workers; and coachmakers, cabinet makers, harnessmakers, distillers, tobacco manufacturers, and establishments of a similar nature which seem to have been operated on more than an ordinary outlay of capital have been classified as manufacturers.<sup>1</sup>

Note that very few people (only 121!) identified themselves as “planters.” Although we use the term today to refer to owners of large farms, even the largest farmers and slaveholders in the antebellum South typically referred to themselves modestly as “farmers” — just as, today, people who own thousands of acres of cropland tend to refer to themselves as “family farmers” rather than, say, “agribusinessmen.”

Categories of occupation in North Carolina, 1860

Occupation	Number	Percent
Farmers	87,025	45.20

Occupation	Number	Percent
Laborers	63,481	32.94
Tradesmen	27,263	14.15
Professional workers	7,436	3.85
Merchants	3,479	1.80
White-collar workers	1,913	.99
Manufacturers	1,308	.70
Planters	121	.06
All Others	608	.31
<b>Total</b>	<b>192,634</b>	<b>100.00</b>

## Full list

The list below is transcribed directly from the 1860 Census of Population and Housing, and includes every occupation claimed by a free North Carolinian that year.

Although most North Carolinians were farmers or farm workers, the state's citizens worked at a wide variety of occupations on the eve of the Civil War. Look over the list and think about these questions:

1. Which occupations were most common? Given what you know about antebellum North Carolina, why would they have been so necessary or popular?
2. What occupations do you see here that surprise you? Why do they surprise you?
3. What occupations do you *not* see here that you would have expected to see? (Check to make sure they aren't listed under another name.) Why do you suppose they didn't exist then?
4. Are there occupations that were more or less important than you would have expected? Why do you suppose that was the case?
5. People responded to census takers' questions by naming their occupations, not by choosing one from a list, but census takers and census officials probably edited the list. As a result, the list partially reflects the ways people thought of their own work, but it also reflects census officials' efforts to put the responses in some kind of order. What names of occupations are different from those we use today, or from those you would have expected to see?

Occupations in North Carolina, 1860

Occupation	No.
Agents	180

Occupation	No.
Agricultural Implement Makers	11
Apprentices	646
Architects	6
Artists	32
Auctioneers	8
Bakers	47
Bankers	15
Bank Officers	33
Barbers	46
Barkeepers	72
Basket-makers	31
Blacksmiths	1,706
Boarding-house keepers	57
Boatbuilders	3
Boatmen	117
Bookbinders	8
Book-keepers	38
Booksellers	8
Brewers	5
Bricklayers	197
Brick-makers	49
Bridge-builders	5
Brokers	13
Builders	8
Butchers	39

Occupation	No.
Cabinet-makers	211
Carders	3
Car-builders	2
Carpenters	3,217
Carriers	43
Carters	42
Carvers	12
Calkers	5
Chair-makers	63
Chemists	2
Cigar-makers	5
Civil and mechanical engineers	235
Clerks	1,626
Clergymen	907
Clock-makers	6
Clothiers	12
Coach-makers	471
Collectors	21
Colliers	18
Colporteurs	2
Comb-makers	2
Composition workers	38
Confectioners	39
Contractors	22
Coopers	1,310

Occupation	No.
Coppersmiths	21
Cotton-brokers	2
Cotton cloth manufacturers	2
Daguerreotypists	23
Dairymen	7
Dealers	19
Dentists	83
Die-sinkers	9
Distillers	116
Draughtsmen	2
Drivers	112
Drovers	12
Druggists	62
Dyers	10
Editors	48
Engravers	3
Expressmen	2
Factory hands	809
Farmers	85,198
Farm laborers	19,119
Fancy-goods dealers	14
Finishers	8
Fishermen	732
Firemen	4
Foundrymen	13

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>No.</b>
Furniture dealers	2
Gardeners and Nurserymen	38
Gas-fitters	10
Gas-makers	2
Gate-keepers	22
Gilders	8
Gamesters	5
Grocers	261
Gravel-roofers	18
Gunsmiths	44
Hardware manufacturers	7
Harness-makers	175
Hatters	85
Housekeepers	2,675
Horse dealers	17
Hosiers	4
Hunters	3
Hucksters	29
Innkeepers	152
Inspectors	36
Iron-founders	2
Ironmongers	6
Iron-workers	26
Japanners	2
Jewelers	45

Occupation	No.
Joiners	3
Judges	6
Knitters	75
Laborers	18,630
Lace manufacturers	12
Laundresses	612
Lawyers	500
Librarians	2
Lightning-rod makers	2
Livery-stable keepers	23
Lumbermen	75
Machinists	194
Mantua-makers	106
Manufacturers	43
Mariners	1,121
Marketmen	4
Masons (stone and brick)	397
Mat-makers	2
Matrons	13
Mechanics	1,320
Merchants	2,162
Midwives	72
Milkmen	36
Millers	1,105
Milliners	66

Occupation	No.
Millwrights	680
Miners	550
Model-makers	2
Moulders	52
Musical instrument makers	2
Musicians	17
Music -teachers	51
Nurses	39
Officers (Public)	405
Ostlers	236
Overseers	1,782
Oystermen	8
Painters	355
Paper-hangers	2
Paper manufacturers	15
Pattern-makers	4
Peddlers	57
Physicians	1,266
Piano-forte makers	25
Pilots	109
Planters	121
Plasterers	68
Platers	5
Plumbers	3
Photographers	4

Occupation	No.
Porters	2
Potters	33
Printers	202
Professors	68
Provision dealers	2
Publishers	3
Pump-makers	11
Quarrymen	8
Rag collectors	3
Railroadmen	366
Refectory keepers	10
Riggers	5
Saddlers	140
Sail-makers	22
Sailing-masters	2
Sawyers	105
Seamstresses	5,019
Servants	21,092
Sewing-machine workers	2
Sextons	2
Shingle-makers	230
Ship carpenters	70
Shoemakers	1,123
Silversmiths	32
Sleigh-makers	2

Occupation	No.
Ship-masters	54
Speculators	9
Spinners	631
Steamboatmen	12
Stevedores	2
Stone and marble cutters	69
Storekeepers	24
Students	1,547
Surveyors	51
Suspender-makers	2
Tailors	374
Tailoresses	228
Tanners	93
Tar-makers	3
Teachers	1,936
Teamsters	223
Telegraph operators	8
Tinsmiths	89
Tobacconists	274
Tobacco manufacturers	56
Tool-makers	4
Traders	185
Trimmers	36
Trunk makers	180
Turners	14

Occupation	No.
Turpentine-makers	1,111
Undertakers	9
United States officers	116
Upholsterers	29
Veterinarians	3
Warpers	3
Watchmen	39
Watch-makers	67
Weavers	959
Wheelwrights	588
Wine and liquor dealers	34
Wood-cutters	75
Wool combers and carders	3
Woolen manufacturers	3
Well-diggers	46
Other occupations and unknown	604
<b>Total</b>	<b>192,674</b>

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## Notes

1. Johnson , Guion Griffis, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History*, Electronic Edition , 57. Available online (see <http://www.learnnc.orghttp://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/johnson/>) (retrieved on May 15, 2008).

## About the author

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