



Livermore-Amador Genealogical Society

Presents

~
Madeline Yanov

You Are Invited

WHEN: Monday, December 9, 2019
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

WHERE: Congregation Beth Emek
3400 Nevada Court, Pleasanton

COST: No Charge - Visitors welcome



But He Was Just a Farmer! **How to Find and Add Context to the Story of Your Farmer Ancestor**

Do you have ancestors who were farmers? Many of us have farmers in our family tree. Have you found them in any records other than the census? Did you know how farming changed throughout time or how those changes affect our ancestors? Were they employed in other industries? Many farmers had side jobs and some of them had patents for inventions. You will find out that these people were more than just farmers!

Madeline Yanov will guide us in finding available records and give tips on searching the many types of government records listing your farmer ancestors. She will examine the many non-governmental sources that can help to “put the flesh on the bone” on those ancestors. You will see how Social History and Economic resources might show information affecting your ancestors. Farmers were influenced by more than just the weather.

Madeline Yanov, the owner of Time Travel Genealogy has more than 30 years of genealogy experience; specializing in American research. Since most Americans are descendants of immigrants, she is familiar with European genealogy; specifically, Irish, British, the Slovak region, and Russian with a little German on the side. She also has been instrumental in locating and helping to reunite adoptees with their birth parents.

In her “other life”, prior to becoming a full time genealogist, Madeline was a paralegal whose expertise included the “discovery” for cases. This experience helped her in genealogy in analyzing what to search for and how to find it.

She is a weekly volunteer at the Oakland, California Regional Family History Center. Since 2011, she has been an indexer with FamilySearch.org. In 2012, Madeline was elected to the Board of Directors of the Contra Costa County Genealogical Society and is currently the President of that society. She is a member of APG, the Association of Professional Genealogists. Madeline loves traveling around the Bay Area; meeting people and hearing their family stories, and sharing her love of history and genealogy with local groups.

“But He Was Just a Farmer:
How to Find and Add Context to the Story of Your Farming Ancestor”

Madeline Yanov

Understanding Farmers:

In order to locate our ancestors who were farmers, we need to understand not only what records are available but also what records were created that detailed their daily lives and showed what obstacles they faced and how they endured despite being dependent upon almost everything that was beyond their control.

1) A Brief History of American Farmers:

a) Farming from 17th to 18th century:

- Many of the earliest colonial farmers started out as indentured servants.
- Subsistence farming in northern colonies; cash crop farming in south colonies.
- 1619 – The first African slaves were brought to Virginia. By 1700, slaves replaced Southern indentured servants.
- Revolutionary War – Farmers were temporary soldiers between planting and harvesting.
- Bounty lands given from 1775-1855 opened up the frontier.

b) Farming in the 19th century:

- More lands open up to expansion and settlement.
- Advances in transportation helped to ship goods beyond the 13 colonies – steamship, Erie Canal, etc.
- Railroads extended the ability to ship goods to far away expanded markets.
- Irish immigrated due to famine (1845-53). Many were poor tenant farmers.
- Homestead Act of 1862 - 160 acres given to those willing to farm and improve the land.
- Civil War aftermath – South in ruins for decades. Rise of sharecroppers.
- Industrial Revolution fostered new techniques for farming and shipping - 1860s and 1870s saw the rise of refrigerated railcars, enabling food to be shipped long distances.
- International markets opened up to American farmers by end of century.

c) Farming in the 20th century:

- WWI – Farmers increased production to feed America *and* Europe.
- Great Depression – mass migration, dustbowls and droughts, regulations and subsidies, rural mail service increased, WPA property invoices in rural Michigan
- WWII – both men and women leave the farm for military service and industrial work. Rationing, increased output and “victory gardens” were promoted.
- Post WWII – decline of small family farms and rise of big agribusiness and foreign investors.

d) Sharecroppers

- Sharecroppers paid their rent in crop production.
- Contracts spelled out where they were to farm, what they were to do and sometimes what the land owner had to provide.
- Sometimes the new employer was the former slave master.

2) Governmental Resources:

a) Federal Census – There are Population, Agricultural and Manufacturing Schedules.

b) State Census – Many state censuses recorded information about land usage.

c) Land Records

- Bounty land warrants
- Land patents
- Homestead applications
- Plat maps
- Land transfers

d) Property tax records

e) Probate records

- Wills
- Estate Inventories
- Accounting

3) Non-Governmental Records:

a) Personal diaries and journals – Rare before the 19th century.

b) Farmer's Almanacs and Sears Catalog give a good picture of what life was like for the farmer.

c) Newspapers

- Weekly crop reports
- Land transfers
- Probates
- Bankruptcies listed in court records and newspapers.
- Property taxes – delinquency and foreclosures listed in newspapers.

d) Farming Newspapers and Journals

- Weekly and regional crop reports
- Transportation advances
- Farming organization meetings
- Large land sales and transfers

- e) County histories tell genealogy of early settlers and pioneers of that county.
- f) County business and farmers directories indicated a farmer's side businesses.

4) Being More than Just a Farmer:

- a) Businessman – A farmer needed to know marketing, investments, horticulture, animal husbandry, meteorology and the latest technology of the times.
- b) Manufacturer – Industry Schedules showed side businesses like grain mills, blacksmith shops tanneries or carpenter shops.
- c) Inventor – If you couldn't find or buy an item = invent it. Many farmers were inventors. Check Google Patents or the U.S. Patent Office

5) How social conditions, the weather, and economics affected the farmer

- a) Weather:
 - 1816 “The year there was no summer” Snow in July and August. Worldwide effect
 - 1935 “Black Sunday”. In one day over 300 million tons of topsoil were displaced. One of the worst dust storms in American history. Affected mainly Oklahoma and Texas
 - 1936 Heat wave. Worst American heat wave in history up to 2012.
- b) Economic problems;
 - US had multiple depressions, recessions and panics all of which affected the prices farmers paid for seed and sold their crops for.
 - If demand for a crop declined, the farmer had to diversify or go broke.
 - Rise of agricultural movements against railroads, creditors, regulations. Rise of the Populist Party against Republicans and Democratic parties.
- c) Farming Movements and Organizations
 - The Grange or Order of the Patrons of Husbandry (www.nationalgrange.org)
 - Farmer's Alliance
 - Farm Bureau (www.fb.org/ (<http://www.fb.org/>))
 - Populist Party

6) Where to Find Records or Information:

- a) County Archives or Courthouses for bill of sale, and probate records, plat maps
- b) Online databases: *FamilySearch.org*, *Ancestry.com* (U.S. Southeast Region Farm Ownership Case Files 1938-1946,), *Cyndi's List*, www.cyndislist.com, *Fold3.com* for Bounty Land Warrants, *Bureau of Land Management* for Land Patents
- c) County History Books – online and in county and state archives

- d) County historical or genealogical societies.
- e) Town or village museums
- f) Historic Farms – Check Google or Wikipedia
- d) Online books: *Family Search* (www.familysearch.org), *Internet Archive* (www.archive.org), *Google Books* (<https://books.google.com/>) and *Hathitrust* (www.hathitrust.com)
- e) Other online sites: *Cyndi's List*, *Linkpendium*, or *Family Search Wiki*
- f) Newspapers: *Newspapers.com*, *GenealogyBank.com* (The American Farmer 1819-1828), Library of Congress *Chronicling America*
- g) Farming newspapers: *Chronicling America* and See “References and Resources” in this handout.
- h) State digital collections: California (<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc>) and Illinois (<http://idnc.library.illinois.edu/>) have good collections. Google to see other states.
- i) Patents: *Google Patents* or *US Patent and Trademark Office*
- j) Historical weather – Farmer’s Almanac or on the U.S. Weather Bureau website
- k) Catalogs or Periodicals: Sears Catalogs – *Ancestry.com*, Farmer’s Almanacs – *Internet Archive* (www.archive.org)
- l) Century Farms - recognizes and honors those persons/family who have owned farm land for 100 years or more. Usually found in state agricultural department. *Ancestry.com* has some records listed. Also check state historical society.
- h) State university collections – Most states but especially in the Midwest

7) Tips for Searching for Farmer Ancestors:

- a) Start with the Population Schedule of a census. Then go to the Agricultural Schedules (1850- 1880). Follow up with the Industry or Manufacturing Schedules if available.
- b) Most records are stored locally. Check county courthouses first for probate, tax and all land records.
- c) Check state archives or libraries if county records are not available.
- d) Check state universities. Most state universities have good collections relating to agriculture. State universities and state colleges could have been “Land Grant Colleges”. A “Land Grant College” was created when a state set aside and sold land

specifically for the teaching of agriculture along with science and engineering. Many famous Midwest colleges started out as “Land Grant Colleges”.

e) Lots of information about farmers are found in newspapers. They should be one of your go-to resources.

f) Think outside the box. Check E-Bay or Amazon for artifacts or books about the place your ancestor lived in, what they endured and what a farmer’s life was like.

g) Check agricultural organizations to see if your ancestor was a member.

References and Resources:

Farming Newspapers:

“Historic American Farming Newspapers- Updated 2015.” *The Ancestor Hunt*.
<http://www.theancestorhunt.com/blog/historic-american-farming-newspapers-updated2015#.Wh5T3UqnE2x>

“Chronicling America: Historic American Newspaper” *Library of Congress*.
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

Day in the Life of a Farmer

Paulsen, Gary. *Farm: A History and Celebration of the American Farmer*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977)

Schlebecker, John T. *Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Farming, 1607-1972*, (Iowa State University Press, 1975).

The Populist Movement

Goodwyn, Lawrence. *The Populist Moment A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America*. (Oxford University Press, 1876).

*****For Further Study:**

“About the Farm, Field and Fireside Collection.” *Illinois Digital Newspaper Collection*.
<http://bit.ly/2sD5Ixo>

“U.S., Selected Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850-1880.” *Ancestry*.
<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=1276>

“Century Farm” *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Century_Farm

“Historic Farming Newspapers.” *The Ancestor Hunt*.
<http://www.theancestorhunt.com/blog/historic-american-farming-newspapers#.WKSt0vkrJPZ>

“Historical Timeline-Farm Machinery & Technology.” *Growing a Nation: The Story of American Agriculture*. https://www.agclassroom.org/gan/timeline/farm_tech.htm.

Library of Congress. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

____”Rural Life in the 19th Century.” *Rise of Industrial America, 1876-1900*. <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/rural/>

____”Rural Life in the Late 19th Century: Shaken Loose and Moving.” *Rise of Industrial America, 1876-1900*. <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/rural/shaken.html>.

____”Rural Life in the 1870s.” *Rise of Industrial America, 1876-1900*. <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/riseind/rural/life.html>.

“Newspapers”, *Cyndi’s List*. <http://www.cyndislist.com/newspapers>

Schlereth, Thomas J. *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1992.

Stuart-Warren, Paula. “Have You Checked For These Records? Part 3: Century Farms.” 24-7 *Family History Circle* blog. <http://blogs.ancestry.com/circle/?p=886>

United States Census Bureau. Agricultural Schedules: 1850 to 1900. Digital image. <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/agcensusschedules.pdf>

*****For Further Study:** These resources were obtained with permission of Annette Burke Lyttle, the author of “Uncovering the Stories of Farming Ancestors”, *NGS Magazine*, July-September 2017, Vol. 43, No. 3, p. 31-34.