

Historic Pittsburgh

Using Historic Pittsburgh in the Classroom – Census Data

[Historic Pittsburgh](#), an extensive digital resource created at the University of Pittsburgh, offers both an entry point and substantive classroom resources for teachers of American History at various grade and university levels. This example is intended as a model to demonstrate how the Historic Pittsburgh [Census Data](#) can be effectively explored so as to create connections and prospectively spark student interest. An excellent set of maps covering Pittsburgh in 1872 is part of the Historic Pittsburgh [Maps Collection](#) and can be creatively used in conjunction with exercises employing the 1880 Census data.

Sample Questions to Help Explore the Social History of Pittsburgh

The following sample questions can be answered using the search capabilities of the Historic Pittsburgh census data feature. Answering these questions will not only help students understand the demographic history of Pittsburgh, but will help them improve their searching skills.

Question 1: Find the Bottle family who lived in Allegheny City in 1850. What jobs do the father and sons do? What is the industry associated with those jobs? Were the jobs skilled or unskilled?

Question 2: What about the other members of the Bottle family? What do the records tell us about what they do? Can they read? Trace the family beyond 1850. Where do they go?

Question 3: Find the number of waiters listed in 1860 in Allegheny City. How many lived in Pittsburgh in 1860?

Question 4: Find Moris Detcher. What does the census record tell us about him? Where does he live and work? What happens to him (according to the records)?

Question 5: The Pittsburgh 1860 census records show 26 listings for the occupation of “clergy.” Choose one and see if you can trace them through the 1880 records.

Question 6: In 1880 there are 10 listings under “Sister Mary.” Are they all the same person or was it an error? Are they different? Where do they live?

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Question 7: Were there more men than women who taught school in 1850? Did that ratio change between 1850 and 1880? What do you think caused this change?

Question 8: What were the predominant occupations and areas of residence of native born Swedes in Pittsburgh in 1880?

Question 9: To what extent is the cliché of the “Irish cop” an appropriate generalization for nineteenth century Pittsburgh?

Challenges and Brain Teasers

Some students might find a scavenger hunt approach appealing or be challenged by seemingly esoteric questions. With a little advance investigation on the teacher’s part these kinds of questions might be devised, or, perhaps, divide a class into several “teams” and have them think up questions or challenges of their own?

Question 1: What were the names of the nuns living in the Sisters of Mercy Convent in Pittsburgh in 1880? Where was this convent located?

Question 2: Lizzie Hapgood and her husband John of Carson Street 30th Ward had a baby boy in March 1876, but like many parents of the time, they weren’t quite settled on the baby’s name. Can you determine what they finally decided on?

Question 3: Robert Jackson and Cornelia Jackson, African-Americans, were parents of a daughter born in March 1876 according to city birth records. The birth record says that Robert was a “grocer.” It doesn’t tell you where he or Cornelia was born. Can you find this information?

Question 4: One of Pittsburgh’s famous (or infamous) residents was Andrew Carnegie. According to the Pittsburgh City Directories of 1860, 1861, 1863, 1865, 1870 and 1873, Carnegie was listed as a resident. Can you find him in the census records? If not, can you explain why he might not be listed?

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