

East Tennessee's 1820 Census of Manufactures

By Paula Gammell

What's your idea of East Tennessee back in the 1820s? Was everyone a farmer? Were there small businesses? Large? What kind of opportunities were there for entrepreneurs?

The 1820 Census of Manufactures may just make you think, or re-think, some of your ideas. Take a look:

Up in Carter County (that included what is now Johnson County) the biggest businesses were forges, which turned raw iron ore into iron. There were 12 operating in that area; they consumed 2,775 tons – that's *tons* – of iron ore and produced iron valued at \$71,000. No doubt some of the iron went to Carter County's nail factory, where 12 tons of iron were made into nails.

The largest manufacturing business here, by far, was Embree & Reaves' iron works, up in Sullivan County, that produced \$47,000 worth of iron; it employed 30 men, 4 women, and 4 boys. Two 'smaller' iron works there produced \$22,500 worth of iron and employed 50.

Well, the mountains up there are, after all, called the Iron Mountains. But are you surprised to learn that Claiborne County also supported three forges? The largest was Andrew Crocket's, whose 28 employees took 200 tons of ore and made 50 tons of iron.

Hawkins County's census is delightful in that the enumerator misinterpreted one of the questions and so specified *where* the products were sold! John A. Rogers' grist mill produced flour valued at \$15,000, and he shipped it downriver to sell in New Orleans. Whiskey, brandy, iron farming implements, flour, meal, saddles, and planks also were products that went down the river to Alabama (Huntsville in particular) for sale.

One might expect that counties such as Blount, Greene, and Knox, being more thickly settled and with larger towns, had the more, and more varied, manufacturing establishments. And one would be right. Those counties had a wide array of cabinetmakers, hatters, tanners, gunsmiths, cotton gins, pottery makers, saddleries, paper, iron, gunmakers, powder makers, even cotton gins and oil mills.

One might also expect that the smaller counties had fewer and smaller establishments. And one would be right. Hamilton County, the most recent county established, had a population of 821, and only one business listed.

Still, there are curiosities:

Little Rhea County had 6 establishments that did *not* make whiskey (and 14 that did). Their largest establishment was a shoe- and boot-making business, owned by Jno. Parker, who employed 8 hands and realized a profit of \$4,200. That was a large-sized business for any county to have. How did John Parker come to establish it in Rhea?

In Grainger County five manufacturing establishments made flatboats; they made a total of 32 boats, which sold for between \$80 and \$133.33 each. I suppose boatmaking there is not surprising – so much of Grainger being on the river – but why did other river counties not make boats, too?

And whiskey. There was plenty of whiskey. Although I haven't counted, I'd wager that close to half of the businesses made whiskey. *More* than half of Knox County's establishments were. In fact, the grand total of whiskey made in Knox County in 1820 was 99,115 gallons – which was nearly 16 gallons for every man and woman who lived in Knox County!

In 1820 guns sold for \$20, corner cupboards, tables, and bookcases sold for \$5 and \$10, Windsor chairs sold for \$2, crocks, pitchers, and plates sold for pennies. What do you suppose they would think if they knew those same items – *if you're lucky enough to find one* – sell for hundreds, even thousands, of dollars today?

Information in the 1820 Census of Manufactures shows some or all of the following: name of owner, kind of business, raw materials used (kind, amount, and cost), products made (kind, amount, and value), number of employees (men, women, and children), and wages paid, contingent expenses, and general comments by the enumerator.

All of the 1820 Census of Manufactures for East Tennessee has been published in "East Tennessee Roots."