Butter Makers and More: Revelations of the 1929 Census of Manufacturers

The Great Depression began with the stock market crash of 29 October 1929. If an ancestor owned a manufacturing plant at that time, it is possible to learn details about the business at that epochal moment from the 1929 Census of Manufacturers.

The 1929 Census of Manufacturers was the fifth census taken at two-year intervals during the 1920s, but only the 1929 schedules have survived. The purpose was to obtain useful statistical information about industry size, production, employment, power equipment, and fuel consumption. The data was collected partly by mail and partly by paid canvassers. Preliminary results of the data were published in press releases, and subsequently with more substantive analysis and detail in nearly three hundred reports issued in 1930 and 1931. The census included only manufacturing establishments that made products worth five thousand dollars or more.

The Bureau of the Census collected information about numerous types of manufacturing plants, but this article uses only examples of makers of butter, cheese, and ice cream. Those entrepreneurs reported their output to the federal government on Form 103, which contained questions tailored to that industry.

The National Butter Company and Stroup’s Creamery

H. B. Miller owned the National Butter Company at 18 North National Avenue, Fort Scott, in Bourbon County, Kansas. His company produced butter, ice cream, pasteurized milk, and cheese. During 1929, his manufacturing plant operated nine hours a day, 365 days a year. In addition to Miller as the firm owner or operator, the business had five male wage-earners and one female wage-earner, who typically had seven-hour shifts and together earned $5,000. Miller paid $82,291 for fuel. His manufacturing plant produced 244,500 pounds of butter valued at $92,600; 12,500 pounds of “cottage, pot, or bakers’ cheese”
**CENSUS OF MANUFACTURES, 1929**

**BUTTER; CHEESE; CONDENSED AND EVAPORATED MILK**

Under the law, no one but a sworn employee of the Bureau of the Census will be permitted to examine your report, and no information can or will be given out by the Bureau of the Census to any person outside that Bureau, whether in Government service or in private life, which would disclose, exactly or approximately, any of the facts or figures in your report.

**GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS:** Reports are required from all plants. Separate reports are required for plants in different counties and for those in different cities having 10,000 inhabitants or more. A combined report may be made for two or more plants in the same city or in the same county when located in places with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. Name and location of each plant must be specified. (See accompanying instructions in regard to transportation and merchandising activities.)

1. **DESCRIPTION OF PLANT:** If this report covers more than one plant, give name and location of each, under “Remarks,” page 4. (See “General Instructions” above.)

   a. **NAME OF PLANT:** Stroup’s Creamery

   b. **NAME OF OWNER OR OPERATOR:** L. R. Stroup

   c. **LOCATION OF PLANT:** Ashtabula

2. **CHARACTER OF INDUSTRY:** These answers should be as definite as possible in brief space, indicating specific products and materials, not broad general classes. Return with the schedule a card, catalogue, or either printed matter ordinarily used in the concern to show the nature of its business.

   a. **PRODUCTS:** Butter, Cheese, Condensed, Evaporated Milk

   b. **MATERIALS USED:** Sugar, Milk, Butter Fat, Dextrose

3. **PERIOD COVERED:** This report should relate preferably to the calendar year 1929, but it may be made to cover the calendar or fiscal year ending within the period from April 1, 1929, to March 31, 1930. It should, in either case, cover a full year’s operations, unless the plant was newly dependent or went out of business during the year.

   a. **Began:** Jan 1, 1929

   b. **Ended:** Dec 31, 1929

4. **TIME IN OPERATION AND HOURS OF LABOR:**

   a. **NUMBER OF DAYS THE PLANT WAS OPERATED DURING PERIOD COVERED:**

   b. **NORMAL NUMBER OF HOURS PLANT WAS OPERATED PER DAY:** 18 1/2

   c. **NORMAL NUMBER OF HOURS PLANT WAS OPERATED PER WEEK:** 76 1/2

   d. **NORMAL NUMBER OF HOURS PLANT WAS OPERATED PER INDIVIDUAL WAGE EARNER:**

   e. **NORMAL NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK FOR THE INDIVIDUAL WAGE EARNER:**

   f. **IS DURING PRODUCE PERIOD THE PLANT WORKED FULL TIME (40 HOURS PER WEEK OR PART OF THE NORMAL HOURS PER DAY) GIVE REASONS AND APPROXIMATE DATE:**


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Page 1 of Form 103 for Stroup’s Creamery (L. R. Stroup, owner), Ashtabula, Ashtabula County, Ohio; Ohio: Industry No. 103 – Butter, Cheese, Condensed and Evaporated Milk, National Archives Catalog (https://catalog.archives.gov/id/50112168, image 30); Schedules of the Census of Manufacturers, 1929, Record Group 29: Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives, Washington, DC.
worth $1,250; 27,000 gallons of ice cream worth $29,700; $2,450 worth of buttermilk; and $700 worth of whey. These figures do not include sales of bottled milk, since that product was not included in the manufacturing census. Miller’s equipment included ten electric motors whose total horsepower was 55. He bought 1,652,000 pounds of milk for $33,037; 70,000 pounds of cream for $85,477; and 15,000 pounds of sugar for $870.¹

Meanwhile, L. R. Stroup owned Stroup’s Creamery in Ashtabula, Ashtabula County, Ohio. In 1929, his company produced milk, cheese, butter, and ice cream. His manufacturing plant operated twelve hours a day, 365 days a year. In addition to Stroup as the firm owner, the business had one female clerical employee who was paid $900. Stroup paid $3,094 for fuel. He produced 47,982 pounds of butter valued at $22,072, and 15,338 gallons of ice cream valued at $16,872. Again, these numbers do not include sales of bottled milk. Stroup’s equipment included one steam engine and ten electric motors whose total horsepower was 43. He bought 1,529,604 pounds of milk for $48,620; 21,000 pounds of sugar for $1,200; and unstated quantities of salt, milk powder, and gelatin. His sales of butter and ice cream were $39,944.²

Where to find these records
The National Archives has placed a portion of these records online as “Schedules of the Census of Manufacturers, 1929-1929” at https://catalog.archives.gov/id/2790961. As of May 2017, images of schedules for Industries 101 (Beverages) through 517 (Printing and Publishing) are available. Separate digital files have been uploaded for each industry code by state. Within each state, the schedules are arranged in alphabetical order by county. Additional schedules will be placed online in the future.

More detailed information on the 1929 manufacturing census is available on the Census Bureau website. “General Explanations” at https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/03450419v2ch01.pdf provides good background information. More detailed reports and results are at https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html (click on “Special Collections and Reports,” then “Manufacturers,” and choose the report of interest).

Conclusion
The 1929 Census of Manufacturers may help local historians learn about economic activity in the community at the cusp of the Great Depression. Genealogists may learn about a business owned by an ancestor. Alternatively, if an ancestor was known to have been a wage earner employed by a specific firm, the census schedules may provide insight into hours worked and wages earned.

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¹ Form 103 for The National Butter Company (H. B. Miller, owner), Fort Scott, Bourbon Co., Kansas; Kansas: Industry No. 103 – Butter, Cheese, Condensed and Evaporated Milk, National Archives (https://catalog.archives.gov/id/50106156, images 18–21); Schedules of the Census of Manufacturers, 1929 (National Archives Identifier 2790961); Record Group 29: Records of the Bureau of the Census, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

² Form 103 for Stroup’s Creamery (L. R. Stroup, owner), Ashtabula, Ashtabula County, Ohio; Ohio: Industry No. 103 – Butter, Cheese, Condensed and Evaporated Milk, National Archives (https://catalog.archives.gov/id/50112168, images 30–33).