

Taking Care of Business

OVERVIEW: Students will examine a collection of job applications from the 1880s. Worksheets and discussions will encourage students to practice working with and thinking critically about primary source documents.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:

Social Studies Grade 6:

A3.2 Identify the main reasons why different peoples migrated to Canada.

A3.8 Identify key differences, including social, cultural, and/or economic differences, between a few historical and/or contemporary communities, including at least one First Nations, Métis, or Inuit community, in Canada

A3.9 Describe significant changes within their own community in Canada

History Grade 8:

A1.4: Analyse some of the actions taken by various individuals, groups, and/or communities, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and/or communities, in Canada between 1850 and 1890 to improve their lives.

A2.3: Assess the credibility of sources and information relevant to their investigations.

A3.5: Identify key social and economic changes that occurred in and/or affected Canada during this period.

BACKGROUND/KEY TERMS:

- **Primary Source:** “Artefacts and oral, print, media, or computer materials created during the period of time under study”¹
- **Migration:** The permanent shift of people from one country, region, or place to another for economic, political, environmental, religious, or other reasons.²

The Mississippi Mills area was first inhabited by the Omàmìwininì or Algonquin people. However, as European settlement of the area began in the 1820s, the powerful Mississippi River attracted people who wanted to build factories or “mills”, as they were called by the British settlers. By the late 19th Century, the Ottawa Valley was the centre of a thriving woollen textile industry, full of mills that took wool from raw fleece to finished product.

Carding is part of the larger process that takes raw fibers (e.g. wool, cotton, flax) and makes it into usable yarn. A carding machine combs the fibers to detangle and align them in preparation for **spinning**, the step that actually makes the string or yarn. Water-powered carding machines were common in Canada throughout the 19th Century.

¹ [THE ONTARIO CURRICULUM | Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6; History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8 \(gov.on.ca\)](#) p. 223

² The Ontario Curriculum p. 220

The Appleton Mill was established by the Teskey family in 1862. The Teskeys owned the factory for the remainder of the 19th Century, passing it down through generations and intermittently leasing it out for others to operate. These letters from 1886 are addressed to Mr. J.A. (John Adam) Teskey. The Teskeys sold the mill in 1901, but it remained in operation into the 1980s. The building was demolished in the early 2000s.

The 1880s saw a decade of economic prosperity, in contrast to periods of long depression in the 1870s and 1890s. These job applications from 1886 are indicative of the booming textile industry at the time: employers were looking for skilled, experienced workers, and workers with steady jobs felt confident exploring better opportunities. Although this was an era before employment insurance and other social safety nets, the tone of the letters is not desperation. Because of the economic context, the applicants are in a position of relative power: they can state their pay expectations and ask for details about the conditions of the job.

Another feature of the 1880s was the “Cult of Domesticity”, as historians refer to the predominant Victorian-era set of norms and values. These values included prescribed gender roles for men and women, which cast men as the breadwinners and women at home as the nurturers of their children. This cultural trend be linked to the industrial revolution, which changed the rhythm of a workday and normalized a system of hourly wages. Several of the men writing the following job applications mention that they are married – information that certainly has no place on a job application today. The applicants are likely hoping to appeal to Mr. Teskey with a man-to-man presentation of masculinity, asserting that they will be reliable employees because the Cult of Domesticity dictates that men must provide for their families.

Immigration rates to Canada fluctuated in the late-19th Century, ranging from 6,300 to 133,000 new immigrants per year. In 1871, 16.1% of the Canadian population was foreign-born (for comparison, 20.6% of the population in 2011 was foreign-born). Due to various factors (including immigration policies designed to avoid diversity), nearly 84% of the immigrant population in 1871 had come from the British Isles.³ In Mississippi Mills, most of the immigrants in the early 1800s were coming from Scotland and Ireland. As we can see from the following documents, internal migration was also common in 19th Century Canada, as people moved within the country or province looking for better work. The men writing these 1880s job applications detail the different mills in different towns where they had worked, giving us a unique opportunity to examine workers’ mobility in the late 19th Century.

This could be a good opportunity for a class discussion about the process of getting a job. These applicants are writing cover letters to Mr. Teskey that outline their experience, their skills, and their references. What has changed since 1886? How do people present themselves when they want to be hired? Today, formatting a resume to look professional and attractive is part of the process. In the 1880s, these men were probably using their neatest handwriting. Which other aspects have changed? Which has remained?

³ [150 years of immigration in Canada \(statcan.gc.ca\)](http://statcan.gc.ca)

WORKSHEET QUESTIONS:

1. What is the purpose of these letters?
They are all part of various job applications for a position at the Teskey mill.
2. Who is the intended audience?
The letters are all addressed to Mr. John Adam Teskey, the owner of the mill.
3. In three or four sentences, write an example of what you imagine Mr. Teskey's newspaper advertisement in the *Mail* (see Document #1) might have said, based on these letters.
Example:
"WANTED: Man accustomed to carding and spinning, one with supervisory experience preferred. Please apply with particulars of your experience, including duration, location, and type of stock. Include references, if possible.
J.A. Teskey, Appleton"
4. Look at Document #1. What personal information does A. E. Eastwood provide? Do you think it would be considered relevant to a job application today?
In Document 1, A.E. Eastwood mentions that he is married. Several other letters also include similar information. Today, employers may not inquire about applicants' marital status.
5. Look at Document #2. In which three places does John Powell mention having worked?
John Powell mentions working in Brantford; Hespeler; and Yorkshire, England.
6. How is Document #3 different from the others?
It is a reference letter, not an application.
7. What were two challenges with migration that I. J. Fraser (Document #4) experienced?
Professional: adjusting to different types of machinery ("Yankee" vs. English machinery)
Personal: he had been in Canada for three years while his wife was still in England

Document 1:

The Canada Cotton Manufacturing Company.
~~Manager~~ Manager. Cornwall, Ont. June 17th 1886

Dear Sir

In reply to your advertisement in the Toronto Mail, would say that I have had 9 years experience on all kinds of Woolen Cards, either fine or coarse stock. I am a Married man & can give good references am employed in the Canada Cotton Co. at present. I would refer you to Mr. Walter Cummings, The Cornwall Woolen Mills, Cornwall. Please state terms &c. & oblige

A. E. Eastwood

J. A. Teskey Esq.
 Appleton
 Ont.

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TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

Document 2:

John Powell
June 18/86

Brantford
June 18/86

Mr. Teskey

Dear Sir -

Your's of 14th inst. is hand. I in reply as to what mills I have worked in before, I have worked two years in Hespeler Manufacturing Co. having charge of their machinery both fine and coarse, then having a Superintendent over the whole mill. I have been working the last 2 1/2 years for Mr. Slates, in Brantford. Previous to coming to Canada, I worked in mills in Yorkshire, Eng., being accustomed and brought up to Spinning & Carding from being a boy. I also beg leave to state

also, that I have always had the character of a steady, willing, hard working man, as the letter I send along with this will testify. I have a married with three children, could come after giving 2 or 3 day notice here, As to wages, I would start for \$2.00 per day, I have other references from different places, but I think this one will be sufficient, so I send it along.

I beg to remain
Dear Sir
Yours Truly
John Powell

Wincey Mill
Brantford

Brantford
June 18th/86

Mr. Teskey

Dear Sir -

Yours of 14th inst. to hand. In reply as to what mills I have worked in before, I have worked two years in Hespeler Manufacturing Co. having charge of their machinery with fine and coarse, then having a Superintendent over the whole mill. I have been working the last 2 1/2 years for Mr. Slates, in Brantford. Previous to coming to Canada, I worked in mills in Yorkshire, Eng., being accustomed and brought up to Spinning and Carding from being a boy. I also beg leave to state also, that I have always had the character of a steady, willing, hard working man, as the letter I send along with this will testify. I am a married with three children, could come after giving 2 or 3 days notice here. As to wage, I would start for \$2.00 per day, I have other references from different places, but I think this one will be sufficient, so I send it along.

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Dear Sir

Yours Truly

John Powell

Wincey Mill

Brantford

Document 3:



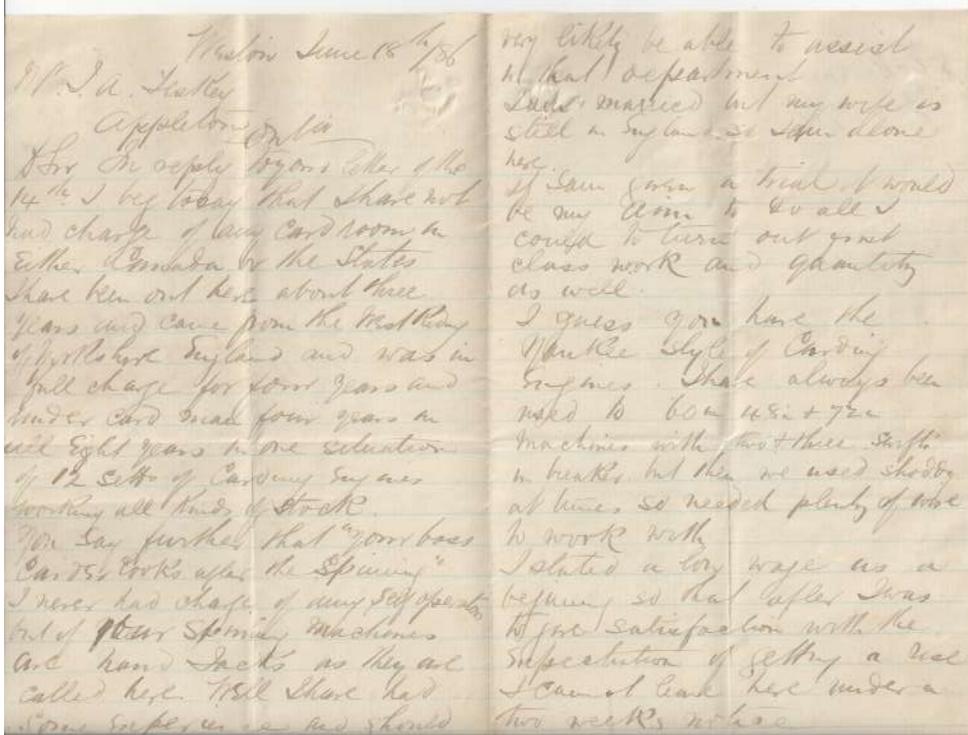
Brantford June 18th 1886

This is to certify that we know the barer [sic] John Powell to be an experienced carder on fine and short stock. Steady & reliable.

Yours Truly

Slingsby & Sons

Document 4:



Weston June 18th/86

Mr. J. A. Teskey
Appleton Ontario

Sir In reply to your letter of the 14th I beg to say that I have not had charge of any card room in either Canada or the States. I have been out here about three years and came from the West Ridge of Yorkshire England and was in full charge for four years and minder card man four years and all eight years for one situation of 12 setts of carding [?] working all kinds of stock.

You say further that "your boss cards and looks after the spinning." I never had charge of any self operators but if your spinning machines are hand jacks as they are called here, well I have had some experience and should very likely be able to assist in that department.

I am married but my wife is still in England so I am alone here.

If I am given a trial it would be my aim to do all I could to turn out first class work and quantity as well.

I guess you have the Yankee style of carding Engines. I have always been used to 60 in 48 in + 72 in machines with two & three swifts a breaker. But then we used shoddy at times so needed plenty of wire to work with.

I started a low wage as a beginning so that after I was to give satisfaction with the expectation of getting a rise I can leave here under a two weeks notice.

Awaiting your further reply

I am Resp

I. J. Fraser
Box 563 Weston
Ontario

Taking Care of Business

Review Document #1-4 and answer the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of these letters?

2. Who is the intended audience?

3. In three or four sentences, write an example of what you imagine Mr. Teskey's newspaper advertisement in the *Mail* (see Document #1) might have said, based on these letters.

4. Look at Document #1. What personal information does A. E. Eastwood provide? Do you think it would be considered relevant to a job application today?

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