

MARS

THE AMERICAN REVIEW OF SOCIOLOGY

GENUINE NUMBER 1 • WINTER-SPRING 1924

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Mid-American Review of Sociology
Edited at the Department of Sociology, University of Kansas

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ISSN:0732-913X

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AGE, LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION, AND INCOME PATTERNS FOR WORKING-CLASS HOUSEHOLDS IN THE UNITED STATES AND ENGLAND, 1889-1890

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Mid-American Review of Sociology, 1994, Vol XVIII, No. 1 & 2: 1-21

In postindustrial societies retirement from the work force is a common and expected transition made by older members of the population. Yet, it commonly has been held that retirement as a normative later life transition is a relatively recent phenomenon (Graebner 1980; Guillemard 1983; Minkler and Estes 1984; Myles 1984; Olson 1982; Orloff and Skocpol 1984; Quadagno 1982; Williamson 1984). Because this assertion is based on relatively little evidence, the study reported in this paper seeks to add to the stock of knowledge about the history of retirement in industrializing nations by looking at 1889 and 1890 employment and income patterns among a sample of households with members employed in nine industries in the United States and England.

Nineteenth-century Industrial Work and Retirement

Although evidence has suggested that retirement did occur in America's past among farming peasants and for property holders who could secure support from their heirs, it has been estimated that unemployment for men over age fifty-five in nineteenth century Massachusetts was less than ten percent (Chudacoff and Hareven 1978). However, research focusing on industrial workers has indicated that unemployment did tend to be associated with advanced age (Graebner 1980; Haines 1979; 1985; Quadagno 1982), including evidence that from 1840 to 1890 unemployment among white males ages sixty-five and older was a steady thirty percent, most of it voluntary (Achenbaum 1978).

It has been pointed out that workers in industrial occupations involving strenuous labor and unsafe conditions were at great risk of becoming disabled, worn out, or chronically ill by later life. In addition to health factors, it has been suggested that the rate of technological change phased out those older workers who did not acquire the new skills that would allow them to compete with younger workers for the more technologically advanced jobs (Anderson 1977; Graebner 1980; Quadagno 1982). Information has indicated that many workers who did not retire could be found either in older long-established

*Research for this paper was funded through a Predoctoral Fellowship from the Midwest Council for Social Research on Aging. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Midwest Sociological Society 1989 Annual Meetings, April 6 - 9, in St. Louis, Missouri.