



Beyond the Sources • James Lawther

Using the information you gather on the web site, answer the following questions about the unit.

1. On this site, you were able to study an invoice from a hardware store that showed items purchased by Lawther. What can invoices like this tell us about a person's business?

Invoices can show us what a person thought was worthy of buying and can give us hints about what they might have been doing that caused them to make those purchases.

What information can they not tell us?

Invoices cannot tell us whether or not the person bought all of their supplies from that one store, exactly what the supplies were to be used for, or how many people worked for the person. They also tell us nothing about the buyer's personal life or family.

Why might it be difficult to understand what a person is like just from knowing what they buy?

Business dealings often have little or nothing to do with what one does in their free time. Seeing what they purchase for business only gives us a partial picture of who the person is.

What other sources do we need to get a clearer picture of someone's life and priorities?

Diary entries, letters to or from the person we are studying, and comments from others who knew the person would all help us get a clearer picture of their life.

2. James Lawther was an immigrant from Ireland who became a success in Red Wing and a major contributor to the town's development. What kinds of obstacles might one have to overcome as an immigrant?

Many immigrants needed to learn a new language, overcome prejudices against them, and adjust to new customs without losing their own traditions.

What kinds of sources might we be able to find that would give us some hints about the kinds of challenges Lawther and other immigrants may have faced?

The most likely source for information about any challenges Lawther or other immigrants might have faced would be a diary or journal. Newspapers might give us an indication of how members of certain ethnic groups were treated, and school records might show that an immigrant needed to learn a new language, but few other sources are likely to document these issues.

3. The sources on the site about James Lawther can tell you much about his business dealings, but not much about his personal life. What sources might we look for if we wanted to know more about his home life and family?

Personal letters, photographs, newspaper articles, and descriptions from friends and family can all give us a clearer picture of what was important for that person.

Beyond the Sources • James Lawther

4. Lawther was not only a businessman but also a politician. How do you think his experience in business could have helped him in his work as Red Wing's mayor?

Often experience in business can help a town leader in such tasks as preparing a budget and following it, working with a wide variety of people, and assessing how much investment should be made in certain industries or projects for the town.

How do you think his work as mayor could have helped his work in business?

As mayor, Lawther could have made connections for later business dealings and gained experience in local government procedures and policies that might have helped him run his businesses more efficiently. As mayor, he would also have commanded a certain amount of respect from the citizens as well as other business owners