City Directories: More than Names and Addresses

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City directories are a resource often overlooked or neglected by beginning genealogists. Why? There seems to be a perception that if we already know our ancestor's name and where they lived, there's really no need to waste time looking at directories. Well, city directories are more than just names and addresses. They are a valuable resource for furthering genealogical research. This class will help participants get beyond the basics of city directory research and explore the numerous ways they can be used to advance their work.

HISTORY

- MacPherson's Directory for the City and Suburbs of Philadelphia (1785) is recognized as the first U.S. city directory
- Early directories were published in New York (1786), Boston (1789), Baltimore (1796) and Hartford (1799)
- By 1860 directories were being published regularly in over 70 U.S. cities
- Publication of traditional city directories decreased during the mid-twentieth century as phone directories increased in popularity

PURPOSE

Although directories benefited the entire community, they were more suited towards the businessman. They helped him keep track of his customers, identify potential customers, and served as an advertising and marketing medium. Businessmen also used the directory as a means for determining if a person was credit worthy based on their status as a home owner.

CONTENT

City directory content varies greatly over time and from one publisher to another. Names, occupations, and addresses have always been an industry standard. Most nineteenth century directories include the following additional information about the city and its residents:

- Advertisements
- Business directory
- Calendar of events
- Cemeteries
- Churches and ministers
- City and government officials
- Description of ward boundaries
- Histories or historical timelines
- Maps
- Newspaper publishers
- Post offices
- Reverse directory
- Societies, institutions, and organizations
- Street directory

FACTS

- Early directories typically listed only the head of the household
- By mid 1800s nearly all adult working males were listed
- Eventually, directories included names of wives, widows and single adult working females

ADVANTAGES

- No handwriting to decipher (printed)
- Listings are alphabetical by surname
- Nearly all adult males are identified
- Printed annually or biannually
- Are available for most large cities
- Easily accessible on microfilm or via the Internet

USES FOR CITY DIRECTORIES

Below are a dozen ways city directories can be used to glean clues, insights, and information that will help genealogists further their research.

Identify Family Relationships

- Listings may include names of spouse or children
- Look for individuals with the same surname residing at the same address
- Use "Reverse" directories to identify married females and other unknown relatives living at the family residence
- Family often lived close to one another, so use directory maps to determine proximity of same surname households

Determine Birth, Marriage, and Death Dates

- Some directories included lists of births, marriages, and deaths for the previous year
- Entries may include a death date
- Entries may note a female had married
- "Widow of" notations can be used to narrow down when a husband died
- Disappearance from the directory may indicate that a death had occurred, a single adult female had married, or that a widow had re-married

Find Migration Clues

- Entries may indicate if a person had "Removed to" another city
- Listings may include a former state or country of residence
- Examine listings of neighbors for potential migration clues
- Find information about migration routes (roads, railways, canals, etc.) and modes of transportation (stage coaches, trains, steamships, etc.)
- Use "Distance" tables to identify towns and cities along major migration routes and the miles between each location

Determine Religious Affiliation

- Use city directories to determine religious affiliation of ministers listed on marriage records
- Identify the nearest church by browsing the listings of churches

Utilize as a Census Research Aid

- Find names of other adult members of a household not listed in pre-1850 head of household censuses
- Substitute for the 1890 census destroyed by fire
- Fill the gaps between census years
- Use maps and boundary descriptions to determine ward boundaries—then search the enumeration district page by page
- Locate elusive individuals in the 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 and 1940 censuses by using the street address provided in the directory and the "One step" census resources at www.stevemorse.org

Identify Friends, Associates, and Neighbors

- When available use "Reverse" directories or city maps to identify neighbors
- Identify potential coworkers by comparing occupations and employers

Find Cemetery Records

- Narrow the list of possible burial sites by determining which cemeteries were in existence
- Use maps to locate cemeteries closest to an ancestor's residence

Identify Contemporary Newspapers

- Search listings of newspaper publishers to determine papers in circulation
- Identify specialty papers (Ethnic, Religious, Political, or Professional)

Discover Land and Property Ownership Clues

- Listings may designate "owner" of home
- Notations such as "h." or "House" may imply home ownership
- Continuous residence at one address over time may signify home ownership
- Reverse directories generally record the name of the home owner of each address

Learn of Military Service

- Notation of military occupations (soldier, corporal, lieutenant, etc.)
- May include a section with the names of local militia officers
- Find listings of Civil War soldiers

Find Occupation

- Use occupations to distinguish between same named individuals
- Identify a person's profession or employer then check to see if occupational records exist

Enhance Family Histories

- Learn about the history of a city. Often historical timelines are included
- Find contemporary place descriptions
- Extract information from advertisements
- Look for photos and/or engravings of persons, places or things

RESEARCH STRATEGIES

- Search every year that a directory is available
- Search competing directories
- Always examine the table of contents to learn what kind of information is included
- Search all known spelling variations of a name
- Search at least 5 years before or after a person appears or disappears from the directory
- Look for directories for cities with populations of 20,000 or more.

CAUTION

- Directories are susceptible to errors and inaccuracies
- Abbreviations may differ from one directory to another ("r" may mean rear, rooms, rents, resides or residence)
- The title page may list the year the directory expired and not the year it was issued
- Don't assume that just because someone was missing from the directory they weren't there

FINDING CITY DIRECTORIES

Fortunately genealogists, librarians, archivists, historians, and collectors recognized the value of city directories and took measures to ensure there preservation. Today, researchers can access print and microform copies of directories at many locations including:

- Local, state, and university libraries
- County and state historical societies
- State and national archives
- Library of Congress
- Family History Library
- Allen County Public Library
- American Antiquarian Society

FINDING AIDS

There are a number of printed and online finding aids that are readily available and easy to use. Be sure to take advantage of these great resources. Use them to determine what directories exist, years of publication, format availability, and library and institutional holdings. The following resources are particularly helpful:

Printed Resources:

Spear, Dorothea N. *Bibliography of American Directories Through 1860*. Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1961. (FHL book 973 A3s)

> Contains a listing of all known city directories published prior to 1860 and includes references to major repositories and their holdings.

City Directories of the United States Pre 1860 Through 1901: Guide to the Microfilm Collection. Woodbridge, Conn.: Research Publications, 1983. (FHL book 973 E43c)

> Picks up where Spear's bibliography left off. The guide is arranged alphabetically by name of city (first entry is for Akron, Ohio), and then chronologically by year. Each entry contains year of publication and full directory title. A helpful index at the back of the book lists all the cities in the collection grouped by states.

Online Resources:

WorldCat (www.worldcat.org). Search the collections of over 10,000 libraries worldwide to determine what directories exist and to figure out which institutions have holdings. Take advantage of interlibrary loan services to get access to far away materials.

City Directories of the United States (www.uscitydirectories.com). This website attempts "to identify all printed, microfilmed, and online directories, and their repositories, for the United States." Use the site to find out if a directory exists and learn what repositories have them.

Cyndi's List (www.cyndislist.com). Provides users with "a comprehensive, categorized & cross-referenced list of links . . . to genealogical research sites online." The site contains hundreds of links categorized under the topic, "Directories: City, County, Address, etc." The links point users to books, research articles, libraries and repositories, and websites with city directory content.

Gale/Primary Source Media (http://www.gale.cengage.com/psm/). Primary Source Media, now a Gale imprint, has published nearly 12,000 city directories on microfilm. Their collection is comprised of six segments: I (through 1860), II (1861-1881), III (1882-1901), IV (1902-1935), V (1936-1960), and VI (1961-1999). The Family History Library has acquired most of Segments I-IV. A helpful guide to their microform collection is available online in PDF format. The guide is entitled, "City Directories of the United States-Author Index" and can be viewed at: http://microformguides.gale.com/Data/Download/3065000A.pdf. The guide is extremely useful for determining what city directories exist and years of publication.

CITY DIRECTORIES ONLINE

Ancestry (www.ancestry.com). This subscription website is noted for its "U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995" collection that contains nearly 1.4 billion names. In addition, they have several large statewide collections that include (but are not limited to) New York, California, Massachusetts, Connecticut, etc. Most collections include images.

Fold3 (www.fold3.com). This subscription website has a sizeable collection of directories for major cities like Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dallas, Detroit, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New Orleans, New York, and St. Louis.

Google Books (www.books.google.com). Find thousands of free "full view" Google eBooks using keywords "city directory." Browse books online or download a PDF version to your computer or mobile device.

HathiTrust (www.hathitrust.org). Free access to over 1,500 "full view" city and county directories through the Hathi Trust digital library. After you select a specific directory, use the "Search in this text" box to do a keyword search.

Internet Archive (www.archive.org). View over 7000 city directories online for free using Internet Archive's eBooks and Texts archive. For best results, search for the name of the city and include the keywords "city directory." Currently, Internet Archive has sizeable collections for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Indianapolis, Indiana, Des Moines, Iowa, and Toronto, Canada.

Other Websites. Online city directories can also be found on library websites, genealogical and historical society pages, USGenWeb, and more. Some good website examples include the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County (www.cincinnatilibrary.org), Toronto Public Library (https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/history-genealogy/lh-digital-city-directories.jsp), University of Pittsburgh (https://digital.library.pitt.edu/collection/city-directories), New York Public

Library (https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/new-york-city-directories) and Lancaster County, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

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