



City Directories Can Add Details and Solve Mysteries

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History of City Directories

- Early City Directories
 - Earliest 1595 in London, England
 - 1782 in Charlestown
 - 1785 in Philadelphia
 - 1789 in Boston
 - 1796 in Baltimore
 - 1799 in Hartford
- Five largest U. S. cities had cities directories, creating a new industry
- Produced by individuals to supplement their regular occupations
 - Newspaper editor, postmasters, school principals, businessmen
 - By mid-1800 full-time directory publishers - staggered directory within region
- End of 1800s – producing directories became big business
 - Trade associations formed to promote publishing of quality directories and prevent fraudulent publishers and canvassers
 - Added more information to make directories usefully year round
- Early 1930s - growth of larger cities became too large to produce city directories
 - Last produced
 - Queens 1912, Brooklyn 1913, New York city 1925
 - WPA did many directories during 1931 & 1933
 - Smaller cities produced directories even into the 1960s
 - example: Melrose, Massachusetts at least to 1962

Purpose of City Directories

Businessmen

- A tool to identify customers and potential customers
- Addresses for deliveries
- Stability of customers for purpose of credit

Publishers

- Support their customers for more sells
- Produce timely information in regular intervals (1 to 2 years)
- Canvased area for each publication, not an update,
- Information was compiled the year before publication

Why Use City Directories – many reasons are the same as its purpose

- Produced in regular intervals, ancestors movement within city and pinpoint year of immigration
- Increased information in each edition through the years
- Census supplement and fill in between federal census years
- New for each publication, not updated – mistakes not perpetuated

- Includes those that don't pay taxes, own land, are renter, new to the area and temporary residents
- Narrow down when changes in occupations occurred
- Locate organizations, clubs churches, cemeteries, school, etc. that might had been part of your ancestor's life.
- Research old buildings

City Directories may contain

- Publisher's introduction – helpful to get the feel of the place and time period, or live in the area which was canvased, changes in street renumbering, etc.
- Ancestor's name, occupation, address
- Wife's name
- Others at the same address
- Abbreviations
- Name and address of employment
- Classifieds of business
- Names, business that was part of your ancestor's life
- Street directory – helps pinpoint where ancestor lived, relatives, place of employment, and nearest churches, schools, hospitals and cemeteries.
- Maps of city - ward boundaries are the jurisdictional units of the city
- History of city
- Events since previous edition
- List of social and fraternal organizations
 - Possible brief history & leaders
- List of churches, school, and cemeteries
- City laws and ordinances
- List of city officials
- Publisher's introduction

Where to Find City Directories

- Local repositories – printed and microfilm
 - Libraries, archives, & historical societies
- My Heritage - www.myheritage.com
- Ancestry.com – www.ancestry.com
- Internet Archive – www.archive.org
- Google Books – www.books.google.com
- FamilySearch – Research Wiki
[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United States Directories](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Directories)
- Library of Congress – printed and microfilm – need to visit on-site

Using a City Directory

1. Obtain the needed city directory
2. Log & Cite the source – watch how the directory is indexed
3. Review the index
4. Review the sponsors or advertisers
5. Review the residential listings
6. Review the business listings
7. Review the street and avenue section
8. Analyze the gathered information
9. Repeat with the next directory

Learn More about City Directories

Creative Gene, Jasia. “I Won the E-bay Bid” - The first of an eleven part series blog describing the contains of the 1925-26 Detroit City Directory she purchased on E-bay.

<http://creativegene.blogspot.com/2007/03/i-won-ebay-bid.html>. 2007

Remington, Gordon Lewis. “Research in Directories” in *The Source: A Guidebook of American*

Genealogy, 3rd ed., Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking, eds., Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 2006 325-352

http://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=City_Directories

Robbins, Miriam J. "Tuesday's Tip: City Directories" *AnceStories: The Stories of My Ancestors* <http://ancestories1.blogspot.com/2008/12/tuesdays-tip-city-directories.html> 2008

Rasmussen, Geoffrey D. "How I Debunked an Online Tree Hint" [Using a city directory] <https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar/how-i-debunked-an-online-tree-hint/>

On YouTube – (in order when it was published)

"Researching Your House: City Directories"- thecityoftoronto (1 yr)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e78GPVDp8LQ>

"Using City Directories to Find Clues to Bust Genealogy Brick Walls" - Family History Fanatics (1 yr) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=telx-Fnoy68>

"City Directories: A Great Tool for Genealogy and History Research" - TheNJStateLibrary (1 yr) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEO_84R3LRc

"MyHeritage's MOST EXCITING Record Collection - US City Directories" - Family History Fanatics (2 yrs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRz2QHR4DmE>

"City Directories & Old Telephone Books: What's In Them & Where to Find Them" - Genealogy TV (2 yrs) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VojVMbN_gw4

"Using City Directories In Your Genealogy Research" - LisaLisson <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcsuFFgIrWw>

"City Directories for Genealogy Research - More Reasons To Love Them!" LisaLisson (2 yrs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2O3BFQZ4mg>

"Using City Directories for Genealogy" - The Genealogy Reporter (2 yrs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftEHVyFOCjQ>

"City Directories: More Than Your Ancestor's Name and Address?" BoundlessGenealogy (3 yrs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxjF8GBS3Lk&t=20s>

"Your Family 101: City Directories - Your Family 101" - Your Family 101 (3 yrs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJQzl53hRtl>

"City Directories: More than Basic Facts" - Allen County Public Library (3 yrs) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_izya8UYJ0

"City and Rural Directories: More than Just Names" - AmericanAncestors (4 yrs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDFJE000kts>

"How to Use City Directories to Quickly Find Ancestors on Ancestry" - Family History Fanatics (4 yrs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy8vsNLNWsM>

"City Directories - Group W Genealogy" (5 yrs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13SlesCC5EM>

"City Directories by Nicky Smith" (6 yrs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HA3druP6eGM>

"Researching City Directories - How To Use Internet Archive" - Marks, Kenneth R. (9yrs) http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=YiRxbOkT_f0

"What's So Special About Your Library's City Directories? - TopekaLibrary (11 yrs) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZT8JeG-Pa2w>