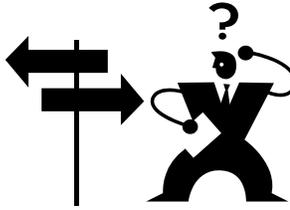


City Directories: More than Address Books



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Questions:

What do you do when you have tracked your ancestor in the census records all that you can? How do you find where he/she went? Was the name changed? What was the occupation? Etc.

Answer:

City Directories! They fill in the blanks in our ancestors' lives that are left between Federal Census Schedules, newspaper records, and other public (and private) documents.

What are they?

The precursors to today's telephone directories.

History

- MacPherson's Directory for the City and Suburbs of Philadelphia (1785) is considered to be the first U.S. city directory
 - Early city 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
 - Major directory publishers included Damrell & Moore, C.S. Williams, John F. Trow, John Doggett, William H. Boyd, and R.L. Polk
 - Publication of traditional city directories decreased during the mid-twentieth century as phone directories increased in popularity
- per Jason B. Harrison, CG® and shared with permission

What do they contain? (Some or all of the following)

- Listing of local government representatives/officials
- Listing of households (by head of household)
 - Each worker within the home given separate listing
 - Work location and home address given
- Business section
 - Listing the businesses alphabetically by category (“Barbers,” “Taverns,” “Jewelers,” “Photographers,” “Carpenters,” etc.)
 - Some large advertisements (as paid for, such as in today's yellow pages)
- Histories and maps
- Event calendar
- Newspapers and other publications of the region

- Locations of
 - Churches
 - Cemeteries
 - Post offices
 - Organizations
 - Odd Fellows
 - Masons
 - Etc.

Hint:

A person might die but his business may continue with his name (often run by a relative). Do not assume that a business still in the name of the deceased means that the proprietor is still alive.

- And, in some cases, more . . . a LOT more

Mysteries solved

- Name changes
- Marriages
- Deaths (women listed as “wid of ____”)
- Moves (even to other cities/states)
- Job changes
- Other family members

Just like the Federal Census Records, the earlier city directories had less information than later ones. Don't get discouraged if you don't find it all in the first directory you check. Look at every directory in which your ancestor might be listed!

Locating/Searching City Directories on *Ancestry.com*

- From home page, click “Search”
- Click on “Card Catalog”
- Enter “City Directories” in “Title” box
 - They are cataloged under Directories & Member Lists
- Select from list provided (they are not listed alphabetically but there are helpful “filters” along the left side of the page)
 - Example: City & Area Directories →USA →Texas →Dallas
- Enter information in the Search box
 - Name (may be surname only)
 - Location (by city)
 - Date

Suggestion:

When you find a family surname, look for others with the same name living at the same address or working in the same location – possibly another family member!

OR

Browsing City Directories on *Ancestry.com*

- From the “Directories & Member Lists,” click “City & Area Directories”
- Click on the location desired from the expanded Location filter on the left & select the decade in the “Filter by Dates” field
- Above the list is “Search entire City & Area Directories” Category; click
- Use the “Featured Data Collections” options to the right (e.g., “US, City Directories, 1822-1995”); click
- Select the State, City/County, & Year in the “Browse this Collection” option with the drop-down menus
 - Example: Browse this Collection →Texas →Dallas →Year (eg, 1884)

The “filmstrip” for BROWSING the Directories

This feature does *not* work for searching the directories. (Even if you have located your ancestor with a “Search,” you might also want to investigate the “browsing” option in that same directory in order to locate additional information.)

How it looks and how to use it:

When you are browsing, at the bottom of the screen on some, *but not all*, is a “filmstrip” icon next to the image numbers; you can put it up by clicking that icon and remove it by clicking the X in the upper right part of the strip. Using this allow you to

- Scroll through thumbnails of the whole directory, making it easier to locate a particular page (e.g., the Table of Contents, usually a number of pages into the book, or the Title Page, also seldom the first or second page)
- Hover the cursor over the questioned thumbnail; a slightly larger version will appear, much easier to read
- Scroll through the entire book (as if you were reading it on a microfilm reader, only much faster)
- Move rapidly through the filmstrip using the left and right arrows at its sides
- Advance by page or groups of pages by using the arrows on the main screen, about midway between the top and bottom of the view
- Advance by groups of pages/images by entering another image number in the advance box at the bottom of the image, right above the filmstrip
- View easy to read (transcribed) details about households by clicking the “person” icon to the right on the image counter

Remember: while you are viewing pages, most scans are showing you 2 pages at a time, so the image numbers are not going to correspond with the page numbers.

GUESSWORK HINTS:

You are looking for an ancestor whose surname is “Miller.” See how many images are in the book (let’s say there are 400 – they are listed on the selection bar at the bottom of the image). “Miller” is likely to be about halfway through the alphabet, so the most obvious next step would be to enter image “200” in the selection box on the bar, then hit “go” or your keyboard “enter” button. But remember, the end of the book contains the “yellow pages” – listing of businesses – so “400 images” likely means that 300 or so of them contain individuals’ addresses and the last 100 will be businesses. Still thinking of “Miller” as about halfway through the alphabet, I would take a guess that image 150 would be close to my target. Entering that number in the selection box may get me into the “L” surnames or the “N” surnames, but now I can narrow my guesses (maybe by 10 or 20 images at a time), remembering that if I am at “L,” there are likely to be a large number of “Ma” and “Me” names before I get to “Mi.”

HINT: The older form of alphabetizing put the “Mc” names at the end of the “M” names, so if I am looking for “McDonald,” I will *probably* have to go past all of the “M” listings before I will find my target. (Some will include “Mac” with the “Mc” grouping, some not.)

Can’t read the image well?

- Use the lever at the right on the image screen to increase or decrease image size
- Go to the “tools” icon (a picture of a wrench) to do additional manipulation

- Rotate the image (if you want to read an ad that has its print running along the side of a page – a technique used by some advertisers)
- Flip horizontally or vertically (I’m not sure why, but you can, if you like . . . maybe to print a page to use as an iron-on transfer?)
- Invert colors (i.e., white on black) – which sometimes can bring out part of an image that is otherwise hard to decipher, but if printing that page it will use up a whole lot of black ink
- Make “full screen” by clicking the diagonal “double arrow” at the top of the tool bar at the right, on the image (this will make the filmstrip disappear, however); hit your “escape button” on the keyboard or click the arrow icon again to get out of the full screen mode (“Full screen” still lets you invert colors, rotate image, etc.)
 - Go to the image advance bar at the bottom of the main image (where it allows you to enter an image number to advance quickly, as explained above); click on the “person” icon
 - This brings up a listing of the people on the page on your viewer
 - Scroll up and down the page with the bar on the left of that listing; all the people on the page will be printed out as indexed . . . this is more reliable than the OCR method, however, anything that is still unclear or spelled wrong is still likely to show that error in this index (nevertheless, it may help you decipher what you couldn’t make out before)
 - Note: this bar will also disappear if you move to full screen mode
 - In most searches, but not necessarily all, the name you have entered will be highlighted in the text on the image; that may help you find “your person”

Use “keyword” for exciting discoveries

Who else lives there?

- Using the Search option for a given directory or collection, enter city, county, state under “Lived in”
 - Add the year, if applicable
 - Leave “Name” fields empty
- Enter family’s address under “Keyword”
 - for example:
Lived In _____ Dallas, Dallas, Texas (for extensive search)
Any Event, enter year and location: (to search a specific year or year span)
Keyword: 211 Polk (Do NOT mark “exact”)
 (using quotation marks may get you better results, but it may make it worse; try both ways)
- Click “search” to find others living at that address
 (note: because the search is OCR, you will likely get hits that are not even close; don’t get discouraged, keep trying)

A note about the “keyword” option: If your ancestor lived on “Greenwood,” entering that will bring up all the people named “Greenwood,” as well as those on Greenwood St., Ave., Rd., etc. And if your ancestor was a “tailor” and you want to locate all those whose occupation was “tailor,” also expect to get hits on people named “Tailor” and, of course, all those living on “Tailor Street.” (And if you don’t click “Exact” on the spelling, you’ll get the “Taylors” and maybe “Tylers” as well.)

Where do they work?

If you already know your ancestor was a jeweler, but you don't know who else might work with him or even his name, use the keyword box to find him or the company. (Remember, many occupations are abbreviated and too numerous to make this a reasonable search: e.g., "clk" for "clerk" – but almost every business had at least one clerk!)

Suggestions:

- *Be sure to read the information given under*
 - "Source information"
 - "About US City Directories"
- *Use "right click" and "open link in new tab" option to keep your place while moving from directory to directory*

Citing City Directories

- Follow basic directions from Elizabeth Shown Mills's *Evidence Explained*
- Use the page number from the top (or bottom) of the page where your ancestor information is located (not the "image number" on the screen shot)
- Go back to the front of the book to access exact
 - Title
 - Author (if there is one; there usually isn't)
 - Publisher information
 - Date of publication
- If you located the directory online, be certain to clarify that information as well:
 - What database collection
 - What website
 - URL (keep in mind, URLs change; keep it simple)
 - Date of access
 - Who found it (you?)

Note: Do not assume the publication date is the date in the directory title; it could be a year earlier or later.

A second reminder: the *Ancestry* "image" number is NOT the same as the publication PAGE number. The latter is either at the top of the page (though may be incorporated in a page/publication identification "strip" just below the very top, where an ad may be placed above it) or at the bottom and should always be part of the citation; the image number may be included in the citation, if you choose.

A helpful suggestion when citing the information: The window at the right

- On the toolbar on the right of the image is an arrow, pointing to the right against a vertical line – click that and the information on the right will disappear, giving you more image view
- However, if that arrow is pointing inward, away from the vertical line, click it to make the information box return
- The information screen has three sections:
 - **Detail** – refers to the search person and data that was on your initial search (note: if you are doing a general browse of a directory, there will not be any information in this section)

- **Related** – refers to any additional “suggested records” that might pop up that Ancestry can recommend (also will be blank if doing a general browse)
- **Source** – The title of the directory and its data (though may *not* be the actual publication date . . . you need to still verify that), along with information about the original source of the database, and a reminder to check the publication itself for the information on full title, publisher, etc. **DO NOT USE THIS AS A BOILERPLATE SOURCE FOR YOUR RESEARCH CITATION** (i.e., don’t just copy and paste the information and stick on your research document, on your online tree, or in your genealogy software as the “Source” – it is just information about the general database the source came from)

Online resources

- FamilySearch. “United States Directories.” *FamilySearch.org*, 16 July 2015. Access from https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Directories .
- Ingle, Cyndi. “Directories: City, County, Address, etc.” *Cyndi’s List*, 2016. Access from <https://www.cyndislist.com/directories/general/>.
- Robbins, Miriam J. *Online Historical Directories* (blog), 2015. Access from <https://onlinedirectorysite.blogspot.com/>.
- City Directories of the United States of America*. Project (examples, purposes, case studies, request for volunteers, but does not appear to have been updated in over 20 years), 2002-2003. Access from <https://www.uscitydirectories.com/>.

Short list of suggested readings

(Courtesy of Jason B. Harrison, CG® and used with permission):

- Bradbury, Connie. “I [Love] City Directories.” *NGS Newsmagazine* 31, no. 2 (April/May/June 2005): 35- 37.
- Crandall, Ralph J. “The Value and Scope of City Directories.” *Ancestry* 19, no. 4 (July/August 2001): 51-54.
- Croom, Emily. “Enhance Your Research with City Directories.” *Family Chronicle* 11, no. 2 (November/December 2006): 39-41.
- Hinckley, Kathleen W. “Analyzing City Directories.” *OnBoard* 2 (May 1996): 16.
- Meyerink, Kory L. “Effective Use of City Directories.” *Heritage Quest Magazine* 17, no. 2 (March/April 2001):24-39.
- Remington, Gordon L. “Directories,” in *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy, 3rd edition*, ed. by Loretto Dennis Szucs and Sandra Hargreaves Luebking (Provo, Utah: Ancestry, 2006), 325-352.
- Thompson, Patricia Dingwall. “City Directories: A Treasure Chest of Information.” *Everton’s Genealogical Helper* 63, no. 1 (January/February 2009): 20-23.
- Vodicka, Julia Schwab Roberts. “The Riches of City Directories.” *Illinois State Genealogical Society Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 99-105.
- Witcher, Curt. “Using Directories for Genealogical Research.” *Ancestry* 14, no. 5 (September/October 1996): 30-33.