

Effective Use of City Directories

I. What is a city directory?

- Directories are the predecessors of our phone book today.
- They are a window into the lives, society, conditions, sources, and most of the residents of the cities of our nation. Some directories covered entire counties.
- They contain amazing amounts of key information concerning the residences, businesses and institutions of a city or town.
- They were published annually thus filling in the gap of years between the censuses (and your timeline.)

II. Contents of a city directory.

The contents could vary from city to city, state to state and publisher to publisher but can contain the following items:

- Publishers introduction
- History of the city
- Street directory
- Ward boundaries
- Map of city
- Abbreviations
- Directory of churches
- Directory of cemeteries
- List of city officials
- Classified list of businesses
- List of fraternal and social organizations
- City laws and ordinances
- Calendar of events
- Reverse of Criss-cross listings

Make sure you check the contents of the city directory.

III. Who is listed and what type of information is given concerning them?

- Head of household - his occupation and may name wife, address of his employment and also home address
- Widows - after her husband dies she can be listed widow of (husband's name)
- Adult children still living at home
- If the directory you are searching has a listing of residences by address, you see who is living at that address. This is called a criss-cross listing.

IV. Creative listings

- Lists of Civil War soldiers who served from the city
- Death dates for persons who had passed away during the preceding year
- Notations of removals from the city and where the resident settled

V. How to search city directories

- Entries are listed alphabetically so only search for your ancestors surname and you will see all of the people with that surname.
- Many people have the same name, so use other records to confirm that he/she is the right person.

- If you can't find a city directory for the small town of your ancestor, check directories of larger nearby cities to see if your ancestor's small town was included.
- Once you have found your ancestor in a city directory, enter the street address into the key word field in quotes to find others living at that same address.
- Look at addresses and occupations of others with the same surname that might be living in neighboring houses or working in same industry.

VI. Analyze evidence found in city directories

Information for a city directory is obtained at the time it occurred by an eyewitness.

- Is it a primary or secondary record?
- Is the information found in it direct or indirect evidence?
- When and where was the record made?
- Who made it?
- For what purpose was it made?

VII. Sources for city directories online

- <http://www.ancestry.com/> - search - directories (\$) (*free at FHC*)
- <http://sites.google.com/site/onlinedirectorysite/>
- <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/> - search - directories (*free*)
- <http://distantcousin.com/> - city directories (*free*)
- <http://books.google.com/> - type in city, county, state (*free*)
- <http://olddirectorysearch.com/> (1777 Conn. other states 1800-1930's) (*free*)
- <http://www.fold3.com/> - under keyword search, type city directories (not all states listed and only one or two per state) (*footnote free at FHC*)

VIII. Recording the city directory record

- Enter in research log.
- Enter in timeline
- Enter in PAF

IX. Conclusion

You will find that city directories can be a gold mine filled with many golden nuggets to help break through stone walls or help you find someone on a census record. City directories are:

- Easy to use (alphabetical and printed)
- Readily available (libraries, microfilm and internet)
- Comprehensive (designed to identify all adult males in a location)
- Good identifiers of people (occupations, addresses, wives and adult children)
- Available for 200 years (1800-2000) of history
- Created more frequently than most records (annually for most cities)
- An original record created at the time families were living.

Note: Women may appear in a directory before they are married.

(The conclusion list was obtained from

<http://www.progenealogists.com/citydirectories.htm>)