

CITY DIRECTORIES

UNDERSTANDING THEM AND THEIR
USE IN GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

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AGENDA

- City Directories
 1. What are they?
 2. What is in one?
 3. Where do you find them?
- City Directories; Evolution and History

AGENDA

- City Directories
 1. How were they used?
 2. How was the data gathered?
 3. Who was listed?
 4. How are they Useful?
- Some comments on Methodology and Issues
- City Directories; Some Examples
- Using Ancestry to find directories
- Summary

CITY DIRECTORY; WHAT IS IT?

- Before there were telephone directories and the yellow pages, there were city directories
- Available for cities
- Frequent, often annually
- Address listing for:
 1. Households
 2. Businesses
- A lesser known and underutilized asset for genealogy

CITY DIRECTORY; WHAT IS IT?

- ▣ In the form of a thick book
- ▣ Generally printed on poor quality paper
- ▣ Was intended for use by businesses
- ▣ Originally, often gathered and published by the local Newspaper publisher
- ▣ Information collected by canvassers
- ▣ Usually restricted to city limits
- ▣ Lots of ancillary information to attract users

CITY DIRECTORY; WHAT IS IN ONE? (19th CENTURY)

- ▣ Introductory Material
 1. Publishers introduction
 2. History of the city
 3. Street directory
 4. Ward boundaries
 5. Map of the city
 6. Abbreviations

CITY DIRECTORY; WHAT IS IN ONE? (19th CENTURY)

- The Main Event
 - The Alphabetical address directory
 1. Households
 2. Businesses
 - Street Directory (Chris-cross directory)
 1. Trace everyone who lives on a certain block or neighborhood
 2. Essentially a kind of index by location or neighborhood

CITY DIRECTORY; WHAT IS IN ONE? (19th CENTURY)

- ▣ Other really interesting Stuff
 1. Directory of Churches
 2. Directory of Cemeteries
 3. List of City Officials
 4. Classified list of businesses
 5. List of Fraternal and Social Organizations
 6. City laws and ordinances
 7. Calendar of events

CITY DIRECTORIES (WHERE DO YOU FIND THEM?)

- ▣ Municipal libraries in the city of interest
- ▣ County public libraries in the city of interest
- ▣ State libraries/State historical societies/State archives
- ▣ Family History Library (Salt Lake City)/
Family History Center
- ▣ Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.)
- ▣ New York Public Library

CITY DIRECTORIES (WHERE DO YOU FIND THEM?)

- Major Libraries in most cities having directories
- Ancestry.com
 1. Subscription
 2. Library Edition (Ridgewood)
- Internet/Online sources
 1. Spotty
 2. Growing
 3. Free/fee-based

CITY DIRECTORIES; EVOLUTION AND HISTORY

- First city directories
 1. Philadelphia (1785)
 2. New York followed in 1786
 3. Boston added by end of 18th Century
- By the mid 1800's, full time directory publishers had appeared in the major cities
 1. Typically covered several cities in a region
 2. Staggered publication

CITY DIRECTORIES; EVOLUTION AND HISTORY

- Competition introduced innovations
 1. Some became standard fare
 2. Others did not catch on
- Examples
 1. Lists of civil war soldiers from the city
 2. Date of death for people from the year before
 3. Notification of removals from the city and where they went

CITY DIRECTORIES; EVOLUTION AND HISTORY

- As Mega-cities formed, Directory publication ceased
 1. No longer economically feasible
 2. Last regularly published directory for New York (Manhattan and the Bronx) was in 1925
 3. Queens stopped after 1912
 4. Brooklyn stopped after 1913
 5. One last gasp courtesy of the WPA
 - Manhattan (with Richmond) 1931, 1933
 - Queens, Brooklyn 1933
 6. Chicago (1928), Los Angeles (1940's)

CITY DIRECTORIES; HOW WERE THEY USED?

- Chief Purpose to aid businessmen
 1. Identifying customers
 2. Identifying potential customers
 3. Needed maximum names listed
- Other uses
 1. Determine whether to extend credit
 2. Locate a customer to collect balance due
 3. Vehicle for advertising
 - Ad banners in margins
 - Bolded entries cost extra

CITY DIRECTORIES; HOW WAS THE DATA GATHERED?

- Gathered by canvassers
- In its prime, these were full time trained people
- Information was gathered in a series of ways
 1. Face-to-face
 2. Asking others
 3. Skipped
 4. Mail back
 5. Turn around document
 6. Hard to find residents and businesses

CITY DIRECTORIES; WHO WAS LISTED?

- Fundamentally, adult males, plus :
 1. Female Heads of Household (widows, some single adults)
 2. Adult children still in household
- Initially, homeowners and heads of household
- Often and early, renters and heads of groups in a single apartment
- By mid 1800's, virtually all males living and working in the city

CITY DIRECTORIES; WHO WAS LISTED?

- ▣ By 1870, most single adult females listed, if they were employed
- ▣ By late 1800's, most directories listed the wife's name following the husband's name, in parenthesis
- ▣ Early 1900's, student's names appeared with student listed as occupation (post-secondary)
- ▣ Ultimately, the canvassers decided
- ▣ Some canvassers were better than others

CITY DIRECTORIES; HOW ARE THEY USEFUL?

- Interpolating between Census years
 1. When did they arrive?
 - But sometimes it took a while to appear in the directory
 2. When did they leave?
 - But occasionally it took time for them to disappear from the directory
- Filling the Census gap in 1890 (1880-1900)
- The address of work and residence

CITY DIRECTORIES; HOW ARE THEY USEFUL?

- Movements and location in large metropolitan areas, such as New York
- How your ancestors earned a living
- With common names, which is our family in the Census
 1. Address
 2. Occupation
- Proximity to Church or other religious institution
 1. Where to look for church records

CITY DIRECTORIES; HOW ARE THEY USEFUL?

- ▣ Reading between the lines
 1. Finding others by deduction
 - ▣ Neighbors
 - ▣ Fellow residents
 - ▣ Co-workers
 2. Approximating life events
 - ▣ Death
 - ▣ Marriage
 - ▣ Leaving the family

CITY DIRECTORIES; HOW ARE THEY USEFUL?

- ▣ Unknown relatives in the same area and same surname
- ▣ Determine parents of future spouse
- ▣ Determine approximate year of death by “widow/widower” status
- ▣ In large cities (i.e., New York), determine Census Enumeration District
- ▣ Address useful for Property/Tax record research if owner

CITY DIRECTORIES; HOW ARE THEY USEFUL?

- Estimating the date of immigration
- Tracing a known Minister/Rabbi/Priest to their Religious Institution
- Sorting Families of the same surname by address, work, occupation/wife's name
- When a child became an adult
- Post 1940 Census research
- Before 1850 Census, identify other adult male members of the household
- Use neighbors to locate hard to find relatives

CITY DIRECTORIES; SOME COMMENTS ON METHODOLOGY

- Most directories will be on microfilm
- Some have survived in hard copy
- Need to find a repository that fits your research
 1. Date
 2. Geography
- How to access
 1. Go there
 2. Interlibrary loan
 3. Internet

CITY DIRECTORIES; SOME COMMENTS ON METHODOLOGY

- Preserving or capturing the information
 1. Transcribe (paper, computer files)
 2. Make copies
 3. Photographic images
 4. Download from Microfilm
- Preparing for your visit
 1. Know what you are looking for
 2. Have your extended reference material for the surnames you are searching
 3. Keep records of what you have done

CITY DIRECTORIES; SOME COMMENTS ON METHODOLOGY

▣ Document where you found it

1. Date of directory
2. City(ies) covered
3. Canvas date (if available)
4. Page number/section
5. Microfilm reel and section
6. Repository reference number
7. Repository name
8. Date collected
9. Publisher

CITY DIRECTORIES; ISSUES

- Disappearances
 1. It will happen
 2. Establishing why difficult
 3. Is there someone else at that address?
 4. Missed in the next canvas ?
 5. Refused?

- Refusals/Late submissions
 1. Always check
 2. At the beginning or end of the directory
 3. Refusals by address/late not alpha

CITY DIRECTORIES; ISSUES

- Date of Canvass is hard to determine
 1. You may have date of publication
 2. Read the introduction
 3. There may be other clues (events calendar)
- For many cities, there are multiple competing directories
 1. Search them all
 2. Some are better than others

CITY DIRECTORIES; ISSUES

- Look at the directory index or table of contents (missing pages problem)
- Understand the codes and abbreviations used before you search
 1. Example (wid,wd,wdr, h, r, cld, col'd)
 2. Example ("r" can mean rents, rear, residence)
- Published every year, but many gaps
- Printed cheaply
- Many did not survive
- Some areas more diligent at preservation

CITY DIRECTORIES; ISSUES

- Not everyone was canvassed
 1. Not at home
 2. Refused
 3. Some cases, working class families excluded
 4. Some cases, certain ethnic groups excluded
 5. Certain neighborhoods may also be excluded
- Editing/Typographical Problems
 1. Incorrect alphabetization
 2. Switching conventions
 3. Typographical errors
 4. Surname variants

CITY DIRECTORIES; ISSUES

- Sometimes people listed twice
 1. Canvassed at home and work
 2. Recognize because of slight variations
 3. Listing similar, not the same
- Because they were canvassed new each year, this introduced variations

SUMMARY

- ▣ Fantastic resource for genealogy
- ▣ Contain a lot of useful information
- ▣ Extensive coverage of the population in certain time periods
- ▣ A very large number have survived
- ▣ Relatively easy to access
- ▣ A lot of work
- ▣ An underutilized and unappreciated resource