

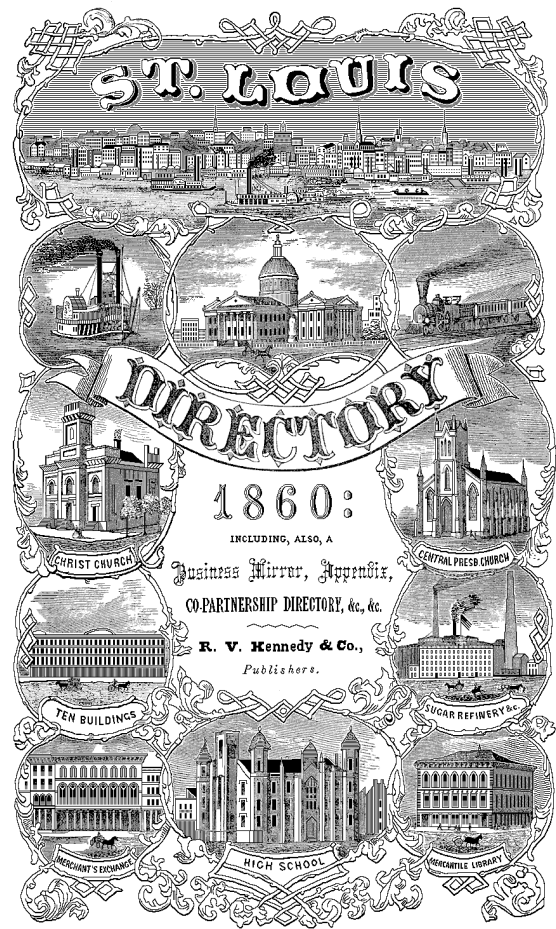
GENTREK: City Directories by **Dae Powell** presented by **Jayne McCormick**

Of course, we all know what City Directories are, right? They were precursors to the telephone book. They even had advertisements in them just like today's phone books. OK, so after the telephone books became household items, why did R. L. Polk & Co. continue to publish City Directories? What is in them that merits their existence and continuance? Let's examine these and other questions about City Directories.

For over 200 years, City directories have existed. Originally they only listed the prominent community members, followed by their services: the blacksmith, the cobbler, the barrister. Later, they attempted to list every person living there. Even though the entries are short, the data that are included can provide additional avenues for your research. They can give you a year-by-year snapshot of where your ancestors lived, how they earned a living, and often much more if you read carefully between the lines.

Here's a **Quick List** of things that come immediately to mind:

- 1- Excellent substitute for the missing 1890 Federal Census.
- 2- Excellent "filler" between the Federal Census decades.
- 3- Very helpful when there is no index available for a particular census. You can convert the address into the appropriate enumeration district (ED) using a guide or map, or tediously search the census page by page by address. The address listed can shorten your time looking for the family on a microfilmed Census.
- 4- Most city directories show the name of the head of household, the address, and yellow pages.
- 5- Often city directories include place of employment, name of wife, and number of people living in a household. Occupations are helpful identifiers to insure you have the correct family in census records, among others.
- 6- Looking from year to year, you can track changes in the family composition -- which members were there and which were not -- moved, married, passed away.
- 7- Because the information was collected at the time of the event -- often by actual house-to-house canvassing -- it carries the same evidential weight as many original records. The resident address is a vital piece of information and can help to identify your ancestor in other



records that also include the address, and mapping it can help you identify where to look for other records, such as church records.

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I recommend a directory search, year by year, as it will often be useful at some point in time. (It may surprise you.) It will always confirm other records you have assembled.

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While searching in city directories, remember the advice given on searching the Federal Census – consider misspellings and typos. Don't miss a relative just because the typesetter fumbled the name.

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Sometimes entire groups of people were omitted from city directories and were listed in separately. This was often the case with African-Americans, non-English-speaking groups, or groups living in distinct ethnic neighborhoods. So, if you can't find your relative in the city's primary directory, he or she may have been in one of these groups. If you know the ethnic background, try to locate a directory published for that specific ethnic group. An example of this is the ***Dallas, Texas Negro City Directory***, published in 1947-1948.

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Don't stop with the head of household, either. You might miss many other clues. Scan the surname for others living in the same residence. With uncommon surnames, you may find information about relatives, too. While researching the 20th century, city directories are very helpful, since 1930 is the most current census available.

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I have found instances where a person is listed twice, once at the residence and once at the place of employment, occasionally with a name variation, such as Mrs. Kaye Soto and Mrs. Robert Soto. So if a trade or profession is given, check out the business section. The rendition of a name may vary from year to year, for example, Jack for John and Maggie for Margaret.

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Our Quick List above mentions the Federal Census. The information in city directories can link to Census records. One good example of a directory's use as a link to another record deals with the 1880 census: Soundex cards for the 1880 census were only created for those families which had at least one child, 10 years of age or younger. Thus, the address information found in a city directory, circa 1880, may be the linkage you need to find one of the many unindexed families from the 1880 population schedule.

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A **Cross-Street Index** is often found in 20th Century city directories. Names are listed alphabetically, but this index is by address of the houses, apartments, or businesses a street index, followed by house number and names of residents. Use this index to find names of people living next door to an ancestor, and to obtain additional information about your ancestor. People living next door ten years ago may still live there, and may still remember your relatives, an excellent technique to find missing, living relatives.

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By the way, the cross-street index is also a great for finding people whose names have changed. For instance, I was researching a widow living alone at a particular address in 1942 who was not in the 1943 directory ... or so I thought. I looked at the 1943 cross-street address listing for the same residence, and found her married, but still living in the same house with the new husband. I learned his name, too!

If you only extract the data for a given person and not others of the same surname, then a good clue to kinships could be missed. Watch the streets over the years, too, and the movements of a particular surname between street domiciles.

If your ancestor lived in an urban area compiled in a city directory, you can determine a candidate year of death by noting the last appearance of the ancestor's name in consecutive directory issues. There are times when your male ancestor's name appears one year and his widow's name in the year immediately following. Once you have a candidate year, use the directory to find possible burial places by consulting the cemetery listings. On the other hand, you may wish to know when a family moved to or from an area. You can learn the approximate year by checking sequential directories to see when your family first shows up or is missing in an area.

Use the **commercial section** of a city directory, too! It has information on schools, churches, cemeteries, funeral homes, and other businesses. You can learn what cemeteries and funeral homes existed when your relative died for additional research. Those pages which include churches, organizations, clubs, and other details have revealed to me that some of my relatives were officers in local groups and a church organization. That was quite exciting for me!

Nine City Directory Search Tips

- 1- Locate the street name in the alphabetical list of streets.
- 2- Check the street number every five years to track the residence and occupants.
- 3- Establish a date range, then check the street number year by year to pinpoint its first appearance.
- 4- In addition to surnames, compare given names.
- 5- Follow up with employment and organizations when possible.
- 6 - Look at the beginning or end of the directory for "Names too late for inclusion." These are the folks that weren't in time to be put in alphabetical order.
- 7- Do your collateral research: Search by street rather than name. This allows you to search for neighbors and other people living at the same street, who may be relatives.
- 8- Using the street directory across several years can help you find street names which changed. You ancestor didn't move, the name of the street changed.
- 9- Use my City Directory Analysis Form on ShoeStringGenealogy.com, Forms Section.

Six City Directory Gotchas

- 1- Information in city directories was usually compiled the previous year. Therefore, the data contained in a city directory predates the directory's publication date by a year.
- 2- Information was valid only when the directory was compiled.
- 3- Directories list the property's occupant, who may or may not be the owner.
- 4- Street names often changed. Try to obtain maps of the period.
- 5- Street numbers changed, too.
- 6- Record the resident's name for each year, as well as the neighbors on either side. If all three

names or numbers change, then the street has been renumbered. What to do? Search the street until you find the same sequence again.

• Full citations, with the names of publishers, is essential. Many cities have more than one directory each year, printed by different firms. How would you cite a City Directory reference in your genealogy?

• Here's an example –

Source name: Texas, Tarrant, Fort Worth – Fort Worth City Directory

Author: R. L. Polk and Company

Title: Fort Worth, Texas City Directory

Publication date: (1955)

In the entry, you would cite the page numbers.

• A footnote format would be as follows:

R. L. Polk and Company (1955), Fort Worth, Texas City Directory, pp. 213-4.

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Where do you find city directories? In public libraries in the regions they cover. In university libraries, at the LDS Family History Centers, and some have been scanned for commercial use online.

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Here are but a few interesting sites for City Directories:

• <http://www.oldcitydirectory.com/>

Sparse, but there are some goodies.

• http://www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/bib_guid/telephon.html

Library of Congress holdings - both printed and on microfilm

• <http://distantcousin.com/Directories/KY/>

Kentucky City Directories

• <http://www.loughman.dna.ie/dublin1850/index.html>

City Directory of Dublin, Ireland 1850

• <http://www.uscitydirectories.com/>

Their goal: identify all printed, microfilmed, and online directories, and their repositories, for the United States.

• A small but growing list of U.S. city directories have been transcribed and placed online at [DistantCousin.com](http://www.distantcousin.com). It allows a Surname search of City Directories in a specific state or All.

<http://www.distantcousin.com/Directories/>

• The Family History Library in Salt Lake City has a collection of the 50 largest cities in the United States on microfilm. You can find a particular city and directory year by searching in

the FHL catalog. Go to the FHLs Web site at FamilySearch.org and use the keyword "city directories (name of city)" to search for a particular city. Also note that Ancestry.com added over a thousand city directories in May, 2006.

In addition to the above, many city directories are available on microfilm in some larger libraries, such as the Newberry Library (Chicago, Illinois), the Allen County Public Library (Fort Wayne, Indiana), the New England Historic Genealogical Society (Boston, Massachusetts), and the New York Public Library (New York, New York), to name a few. Also check State archives, county libraries, and historical societies. Search online for your area of interest and see what you can find.

Summary

"In short, directories offer a wide range of vital clues to the researcher who carefully studies them line by line, page by page, and year by year!" ~ *Kathleen W. Hinckley, CGRS*

1. **Find the street address.** Locate the ancestor's street address or potential address in city directories.
2. **Convert the address to a census district number.** Depending on the year and location, census districts are identified as wards or enumeration districts (EDs). For the 1930 census, the [National Archives' website](#) can help you convert street addresses to enumeration districts. Steve Morse's [One Step online converter](#) translates street names to enumeration district numbers for select years and locations. Use microfilmed enumeration district maps available at large libraries.
3. **Browse census records** by enumeration district to locate ancestors, collaterals and clusters.

Maybe now **City Directories** will rate higher on your list of resources. That is our wish. The room is open again for discussion and questions. Thanks so much for joining us.

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