

City Directories – A look into your ancestor’s lives

City directories are a great resource for information about your ancestors. They can be used as a census substitute and for tracking your ancestors as they migrated around town or across the country. City directories can also provide historical context during your ancestor’s lifetime. Finding information about where they lived and what they did can provide clues for searching for more information about them.

Using the city directory

- Confirm on the title page who published it and when.
- Check the index to see where information is located.
- Check the abbreviations in front of the names to understand what abbreviations next to your ancestor’s entry means.
- Check variations of spelling of your ancestor’s name – spelling didn’t count for some time.
- If possible, search for your ancestor’s address to see who all lived there.
- Read the town’s history for additional clues about your ancestor’s life.
- Use the city directories to create a timeline of your ancestor’s life.

What you can find:

- Historical Information about the town.
- Local, State, and National government information.
- Some city directories will have pictures of the city and/or pictures of buildings in the town.
- Maps of the city.
- A list of businesses and information about the businesses.
- Locations, meeting times, and general information about churches and societies.
- List of newspapers, churches, general social activities for your ancestor.
- Occupations & business addresses
- Advertisements with information about what your ancestor’s may have bought.
- Where your ancestor lived
- Street and Avenue list – list of street name changes.

Where to find them:

Ancestry.com: <https://www.ancestry.com>

Fold3.com: <http://www.fold3.com>

Cyndi’s List: <https://www.cyndislist.com/directories>

Historical Directories Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/onlinedirectorysite/>

Google Books: <http://books.google.com> – search for city directories & a location

Linkpendium: <http://www.linkpendium.com/usa-genealogy/>

MyHeritage: <https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10705/us-city-directories?s=175437652>

Archive.org – <http://archive.org>

Heritage Quest – can usually be accessed through your local library

Facebook Group – Historical City Directories