

## Genea-Break, Cranberry Genealogy Club

### Record Group: CITY DIRECTORIES *Written and researched by Sue Ennis*

City directories are a commonly available resource offering more than just basic information when researching ancestors living in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and a few other countries. Some U.S. regions have county directories as well. If a directory was updated and published annually, then in theory, one could trace the year-by-year residence, name of person and spouse, and occupation of ancestors. If an ancestor was a renter who did not own property, then a directory is helpful between census years in place of the lack of land records for that person. Some directories were published as early as 1810, usually initiated with the formation of a city or town.

A comprehensive overview about city directories is available on the FamilySearch Wiki under *United States, Directories*; use this link to access it:

[https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United\\_States\\_Directories](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Directories). This detailed article describes why directories were created, lists categories of content, and offers finding aids for easy online access. Collections of city directories might be found in local public libraries as well as in college and university libraries. For many years, the FamilySearch Library has been digitizing complete collections of city and county directories. *Fold3*, *Ancestry.com*, and *FamilySearch.org* all have indexed city directories. The best source for accessing directories and for learning about using this record is the *Online Historical Directories* website, found at

<https://sites.google.com/site/onlinedirectorysite/Home>. The site's menu is along the bottom. Click on "United States", then on a specific state, to see what is available for your research. Also on the menu is a listing of resources, FAQs, and articles about the importance of city directories.

Even if ancestors lived outside of a city or town, they might still be recorded in the nearby city's directory. Here is an example of this. Mill City, Pennsylvania in Wyoming County is 28 miles from downtown Wilkes-Barre in Luzerne County; however, prior to 1898, residents from Mill City were listed each year in the *Wilkes-Barre City Directory*. Using another example, a family in Florida asked recently if I could determine when their grandparents moved from Madison in Madison County to Venice in Sarasota County. After exploring a variety of record groups, the best information came from tracing the family's place of residence using the *Florida City Directories* each year from 1940 through 1955. Even though the grandparents were renting from relatives in 1947 while still owning property in Madison, there they were, residing in Venice, where they stayed the rest of their lives.

The New York Public Library published a helpful article about the history of city directories in the United States: <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2012/06/08/direct-me-1786-history-city-directories-us-nyc>. The collection of New York City's directories were digitized and placed online in 2016: <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2016/09/21/new-york-city-directories-free-online>. In addition to accessing directories in subscription databases, there is a free website that offers digitized options. Go to the Internet Archive at [www.archives.org](http://www.archives.org), and use the search phrase *city directory* to see what locations are available. Click on a specific directory to access its pages.

Don't overlook the use of city directories for genealogical research. When findings from directories are cross-referenced with the U.S. Federal Census, tax records, and newspaper articles, your research is more complete. The Library of Congress has a research guide with links online here: <https://guides.loc.gov/united-states-city-telephone-directories/>.

