

GLEANNING INFORMATION from a CITY DIRECTORY

by Brenda K. Wolfgram Moore - Published in #32 Heritage Quest 9.

The City Directory is a valuable resource, sometimes neglected. Most people research for addresses in this type of book, but considerably more could be extracted. There is usually a variety of information relating to the city and county areas in general. The directory can be a street and avenue source showing streets and locations (some of which have had name changes through the years.) There is a city government section supplying state, county, township and city officials. You will find justices of the peace; banks; cemeteries, and post office statistics, which include post offices and their county seats for the entire state often with population totals. Churches, schools and teachers in the county, secret and benevolent societies, incorporated companies, hospitals, public buildings and halls, and the ever-popular, miscellaneous information is also available.

Often furnished in the directory is a descriptive sketch, and an alphabetically arranged list of towns and villages. A listing of all farmers in the county includes the person's name, section, number of acres, assessed value of property township, and their post offices. It can also show the spouses's name and their occupation along with the employer.

A record list of all persons engaged in business in the entire county is supplied, grouped under their respective trades. This tells their occupation and the address of their business. In some editions there are pictures of prominent men of the area.

If you look up a family name you can deduce who is still boarding at home, who has a farm, and what their occupations are. In the city section, the exact street number is given, even if the persons are retired. If you follow through a few years you can watch an individual's moves, made from one home or job to the next. If you want to research a particular address, due to a past family connection, you can get the resident owner's name in the directory, then go to the land records at the courthouse to find pertinent deeds more quickly.

Sometime, just for pleasure, look through the business section to find trades that no longer exist. To name a few: Tinsmiths, Grist Millers, Blacksmiths, Draymen, Carriage and Wagon Makers, Hoop Manufacturers, Coopers, Harness Makers, Sausage Manufacturers and Stage Coach Drivers.

Most City Directories can be found in Historical Societies, and Public and College Libraries. Ask your reference Librarian where they are.

There are no steadfast rules regarding content of City Directories. For example the 1825 Cincinnati, Ohio Directory furnishes the state from which the resident came. Some areas only have a county directory depending on their geographic setting.

Be especially watchful for 1890 directories as they are a good substitute for the 1890 census, which was destroyed by fire.

I hope this encourages you, at least to scan these, the next time they are available to you. Personally, I've found not only good information in them but a lot of entertainment.

POLK DIRECTORIES:

(from Seminar Transcript, by Ronald A. Bremer)

MINISTERS - DOCTORS - LAWYERS--WHERE TO FIND THEM

On ancestors who were ministers, doctors, dentists or lawyers -- if you don't find them in the "mug" books or the county histories, or the Congregational Library in Massachusetts ----

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