

TOOLS FOR FINDING *the* PLACE

by William Dollarhide

THERE ARE SOME BASIC TOOLS AVAILABLE TO GENEALOGISTS TO LINK A PLACE OF RESIDENCE TO A NAME OF AN ANCESTOR. FOR THE PERIOD FROM THE PRESENT BACK TO 1850, THESE TOOLS

include the federal censuses, 1850-1930, directories and phone books, and master name lists, such as those found at www.Ancestry.com. Tools that may extend back in time before 1850 include the 1790-1840 heads of household census lists, county-wide tax lists, voter registration lists, census substitutes, and deed indexes. Finding tools specific to place names and maps include gazetteers and place dictionaries, the USGS 7.5 topographic map series, the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of American towns, and county-wide land ownership maps. With an exact location, such as a property description for the farm on which the family lived, an important tool is a land record, particularly a deed index sitting in the county courthouse. There are more tools, but these represent the best, and those which should give every genealogist at least a 95 percent chance of success in tying an ancestor's name to a specific place. Each of these basic finding tools are described briefly below:

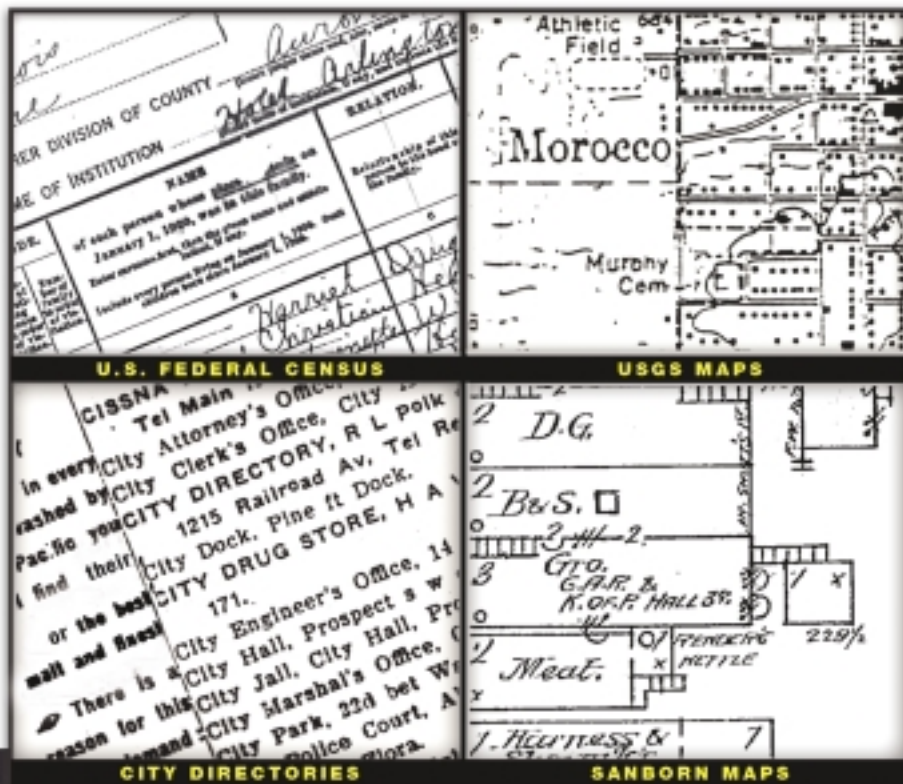
1850-1930 Federal Censuses

Perhaps the best place-finders of all are the name lists of the U.S. Federal Censuses. For those censuses that have statewide name indexes to the heads of households, it is usually a simple matter to locate a person in a census. Since



all censuses are organized by counties, finding a name of interest gives an immediate reward because the census will reveal the place where a person lived. The largest census name lists are those available via the Internet at the subscription Web site, www.ancestry.com and the ProQuest/HeritageQuest Online census lists available through subscribing libraries. The 1880 census is indexed for every name at the www.familysearch.org site and each name is linked to a census page image at the Ancestry site. In addition, there are several statewide or countywide census name lists available at www.rootsweb.com and other Internet sites. All census records

Photos: images from Indiana.



lead you to the place of residence for that census year, but searching the 1850-1930 censuses for an individual will also give you the place where the person was born, making the censuses powerful place finders.

Master Name Lists

Anytime a genealogist can obtain a name list of past residents of a county or state, the list becomes a place finder. For example, the same way one would use a phone book to



locate a name, other master name lists provide a way to determine where certain surnames appear and in what place. One such master name list is available for any surname at the www.ancestry.com Web site. Ancestry now has over two billion names in the database, making it the largest genealogical name list in the world. The database includes thousands of name lists, including those that can be found in the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1930, state censuses and tax lists, military lists, vital records lists, immigration and naturalization lists, and names mentioned in historical periodicals and newspapers, court records, biographies and histories, plus many more individual databases.

The Ancestry database has become a primary starting point for locating the name of a person, and a place where that person lived. But there are other large databases which have unique name lists, such as the *International Genealogy Index™* (IGI) located at www.familysearch.org, a worldwide name index that is place oriented.

Phone Books

Telephone directories are a good source for conducting a surname survey. Where does the surname Dollarhide appear in America? Back in 1972, I looked up my surname in virtually every telephone directory in the country. Back then, the telephone company headquarters in Seattle had a phone book library, and it was possible to open every phone book and look for my surname. (Today, this is called an “ego search”). I found a total of 120 listings of the name Dollarhide, which appeared in 26 states. With an unusual surname, this research pays off—I was able to write a letter to every person I found

with my surname just by using phone books to obtain their addresses. (The zip codes came from the local Post Office’s copy of the Zip Code Directory).

Today, this same search can be done on the Internet at several

Some directories contain more information than others

In this sample, 1916 *Geer’s Hartford City Directory*, shows “Deaths in Hartford, 1 year previous to June, 1915.” The list details: Date of death, first and last name, and age at the time of death.

and upwards:—

7-19-Barnes Anna D. Mrs. 57
3-18-Barnes Emma, 45
3-12-Barrows E. M. B. Mrs. 86
10- 4-Barrows Mattie M. 55

The next example highlights this same *Geer’s* directory with a listing called: “Migrations and Removals, for one year previous.” The entry shows a full name, plus the city and state where the person moved to. This 1916 directory is a genealogical gold mine!

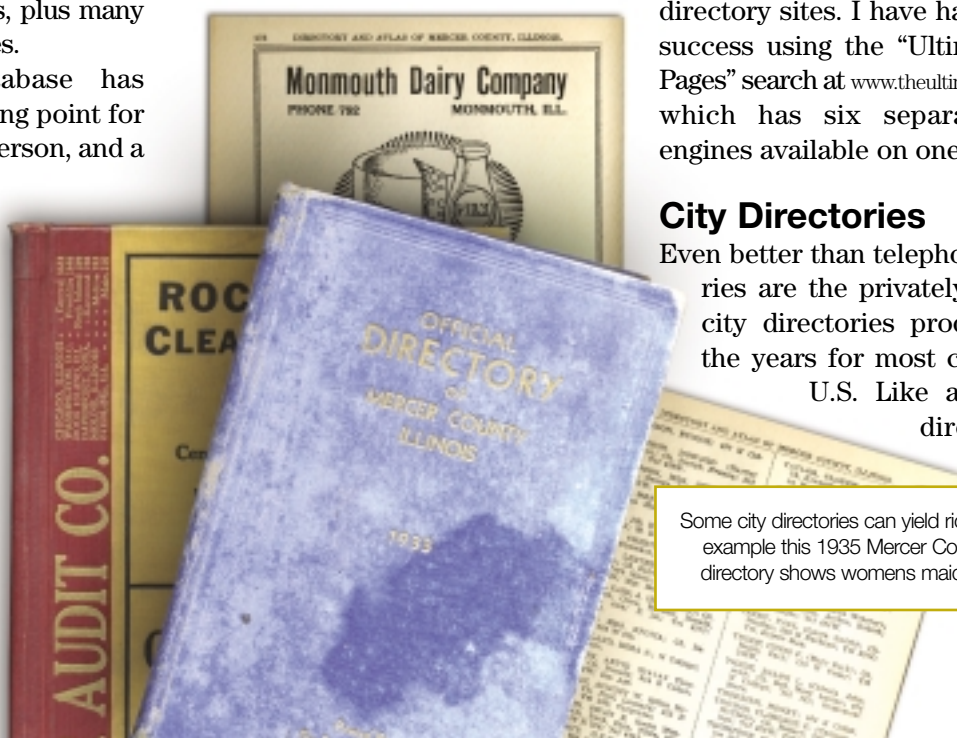
Becker Chas. R., Detroit, Mich.
Becker Harry, Troy, N. Y.
Beckwith Helen C., California.
Beebe Bernice, Melrose, Mass.
Belcher Clarence, I. Madison

directory sites. I have had the most success using the “Ultimate White Pages” search at www.theultimates.com/white which has six separate search engines available on one page.

City Directories

Even better than telephone directories are the privately published city directories produced over the years for most cities of the U.S. Like a telephone directory or

Some city directories can yield rich details. For example this 1935 Mercer County, Illinois directory shows womens maiden names.



census, these name lists can confirm the place of residence for a person in America. A typical city directory gives a full name, address, and phone number for every household in the area. Many add information, such as occupation, names and ages of children, and place of employment. The largest publisher of city directories is the R.L. Polk

first, you will learn where the best collection of city directories is kept. Usually published annually, directories are rarely thrown away, and every city tries to have a complete set of city directories as far back as they were ever published for that city. For example, Boston's city directories date back to the 1700s. (The Boston Public Library has the

To find an address or phone number for a library, go to your own library and find the American Library Association's *Directory of Libraries* which will give you an up-to-date listing of every library in the United States. Virtually every library in America has a copy of this directory. Or, use your browser to find a library using the keywords

The **International Genealogy Index™** (IGI) found at www.familysearch.org is a primary place finder available to genealogists, particularly for areas outside of the United States. Here is where I was able to find the name Delahyde in County Dublin, Ireland from a 1640 tax list, and after a systematic search of virtually every country of Europe. After my IGI search, I decided I might be a wee bit Irish...it was the only place where the surname appeared in all of Europe before my immigrant came to America in 1680. As a result of this discovery, I began searching any type of name list for County Dublin area I could find, including references to the name there today. It wasn't long until I found a small

concentration of the name in the northern area of County Dublin, near the present towns of Balbriggan, Skerries, and Loughshinny, where people can still be found with the name Delahyde or Delahoyde. A few old tax lists, military lists, and cemetery listings from the early 1600s were found, plus several mentions of the name in various histories of Ireland. Since the initial IGI search, which was the first indication that my name came from Ireland, I have made several

discoveries. In addition, the IGI has given me references to the name in America, found in 25 counties of the U.S. (out of 3,140 counties), a number that is small enough to concentrate research efforts into court records, local histories, and local sources for a specific county. Knowing that there is at least one known past resident of a county with my name, I don't mind doing blanket research into that county's records - there is always a chance of finding something about the family there.

The IGI - A Place Finder

Company, which maintains offices in the 50 largest cities of the U.S. Check your phone book to see if R.L. Polk has an office in your area, because they will have in their office all of the current city directories for the area of coverage for that office, and their collection is open to the public.

Although there are a few old city directories on the Internet, the best place to find a specific town's old city directories is at the public library of that town. In some cases, the best collection may be a local college library, or a local museum, but by contacting the local library

most complete set). Most cities on the Eastern seaboard have city directories that go back to 1800 or earlier. And, a library for a Western city like Denver or Seattle may have city directories that date back to the 1870s.

Most libraries will answer letters if a request for information is short and to the point. I have obtained pages from an old city directory by paying a small fee for copies only.

"Directory of Libraries." There are several Internet sites related to libraries, and finding a specific library is not difficult, since many have their own Web site. A local library is a source for old directories, but may also be an excellent source for old newspapers, family files, or local histories and genealogies unique to that area. There is a microfilmed collection of older city directories for the 50

largest cities in America, all before 1860. The earliest city directories were mostly "Almanacs," listing any business or profession in a city, and not necessarily every resident of the city. But, these older city directories can still be very useful. *City Directories of the United States*, published by Primary Source Microfilm (formerly Research Publications, Inc.), part of the Gale Group, Detroit, MI, is a large collection of city directories on microfilm available at the Library of Congress, Family History Library, and many other larger libraries. Dorothea Spear's *Bibliography of American Directories Before 1860* (American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA, 1961, 389 pages, FHL book 973 A3s) is a guide to this series. Another microfilm series by the same publisher includes over 1,000 cities, towns, and counties: the years of coverage are primarily 1861 through 1960. See *City Directories of the United States: Guide to the Microfilm Collection*, by Research Publications (Woodbridge, CT), which indexes the city directory titles through four segments: pre 1860; 1861-1881; 1882-1901; and 1902-1935. (see FHL book 973 E43c).

Tax Lists & Voter Registrations

In addition to censuses and directories, there may be a published tax list for a county or for a whole state. For example, one notable publication is the tax lists compiled for all Virginia counties for 1787 in one (3-vol.) set. There are several other compilations of tax lists for a group of counties, for one county, or for a whole state. If you know that your ancestor was in Virginia, it is important to determine what tax lists have been published for Virginia counties. The best way to find out is visit the www.familysearch.org site at the online library catalog. A "Place

Search" for the subject "Virginia" will present you with a list of dozens of subject items, including "Taxation" as a subject. Virtually every published tax in Virginia can be found here.

Voter registrations are public records, located at a county courthouse. Many voter registrations have been published. For example, the "Great Registers" of all counties of California have been preserved

STATE Illinois 9-187
COUNTY Kane
TOWNSHIP OR OTHER DIVISION OF COUNTY Aurora Township
NAME OF INSTITUTION Hotel Arlington 98-100

PLACE OF ABODE.				NAME of each person whose place on January 1, 1900, was in this family. <small>Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Include every person living on January 1, 1900. Don't include those born since January 1, 1900.</small>	RELATION. <small>Relationship of this person to the head of the family.</small>	TENSE.		PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.		
Street, avenue, road, etc.	House number or farm, etc. (No. in block or lot.)	Number of dwelling house in order of valuation.	Number of family in order of valuation.			Head of household or owner of dwelling.	If owned, time or mortgage.	Sex.	Color of hair.	Age at last birth.
51				Harriet	Daughter			F	W	38
52	192	298	308	Weiland Christian	Head	0	m	W	39	
53				Antoinette	Wife			F	W	33
54	104	299	309	Reitchard James L.	Head	1	0	F	m	39

Narrow Down the Places Using Census Lists

For the heads of household censuses, 1790-1840, an ancestor's place of residence for a particular census year is given, usually down to a sub-district of a county. But using the 1850-1930 censuses, finding a person will reveal the state or country where that person was born. This is where a genealogist may learn for the first time that an ancestor was born in Virginia. Unfortunately, the name of the Virginia county will not be identified in the census records, so some more steps must be followed to locate the right county in Virginia. The first step is to narrow down a long list of counties in a state to just a few counties.

Start by comparing other names that are neighbors of your ancestor in the census. See if there are other families that follow the same pattern of your ancestor's family. For example, let's say you find your family living in Indiana in 1850. Say Dad and Mom and the first two children were born in Pennsylvania, but the rest of the children were born in Indiana after 1845. The birth years may indicate that Mom and Dad were not a couple yet in 1840, but based on the children's ages, you can guess when the marriage took place, and you can guess the approximate year when the family moved from Pennsylvania to Indiana. It may help to see if there are neighbors who are also from Pennsylvania, with the same pattern of births as your ancestor's family. These are surnames you can use to compare with your own ancestor's surname for searching counties of Pennsylvania, because there is a good chance that these families moved together from Pennsylvania to Indiana. But, since all you know at this point is that your

since the early 1850s, and many have been printed and indexed. The list of names confirms a place of residence for someone for a specific time period—as a result they are place finders.

DEPARTMENT OF COMM
NTH CENSUS OF THE UNIT

NAME OF INCORPORAT

Place of birth of each person

CITIZENSHIP.		EDUCATION.		Place of birth of each person	
13	14	15	16	17	18
S					Illinois
m					Illinois
m	1887	X			Canada
m					Illinois

Land Patents

Since 1787 the United States Government has been the largest purveyor of land in America. Federal land began with the creation of the “public domain,” which was land transferred from the states to the federal government upon ratification of the Constitution of the United States. The idea was that the states could stop financing the operations of the federal government, but give the federal government a source of revenue. (In fact, the revenue generated from lands sales to private citizens was sufficient to operate the federal government for over 100 years with out any direct taxes).

The 1920 census indicates a place of birth for a person and for those who immigrated. Moreover, it shows the year the immigrant arrived in the U.S.—a place finder's bonanza!

Land sales within the Public Domain began first with consignment sales to land brokers, who acquired large tracts of land in the Ohio country using Revolutionary War Bounty Land Warrants they had purchased from soldiers. The first direct sales of land to individuals began in the “seven ranges” of the Northwest Territory (now Ohio) in 1798. During the nineteenth century, the main business of the federal government was land sales. About 10 million patents (deeds) were issued to persons purchasing land from Uncle Sam via direct sales, preemptions, or homesteads. Virtually all of the records of the old

people were probably in Pennsylvania in 1840, some more place-finding tools need to be employed.

If you know the maiden name of the wife, you will have two surnames to compare in Pennsylvania. For example, if you know the wife's maiden name was Hill and the husband's surname was Reynolds, how many counties in the 1840 census have both Reynolds and Hill as heads of families? Add the surnames of neighbors living around your ancestor in Indiana in 1850 to try to narrow down the number of counties to search in Pennsylvania in 1840.

You may have to look at every 1840 family with the surname you want. But you can narrow down the potential ancestors by looking at the ages of the family members. (For the 1790-1840 censuses, ages are indicated in ranges for all members of a family).

I once conducted a survey of the 1830 Tennessee census for the surname Mayfield. I had learned that my James H. Mayfield was born in Tennessee in 1827, based on an item in the 1900 census for California. Not knowing which county in Tennessee and not knowing the name of James H. Mayfield's father, I looked at every Mayfield head of household for the entire state. By the process of elimination, I determined that of the 54 Mayfield heads of households in Tennessee, there were only 12 families that had a male child under 5 years old. The 12 Mayfield households were in 8 Tennessee counties. Not only that, of the 12 Mayfield households, there were just 4 given names, that is, there was William Mayfield (3), Thomas Mayfield (2), James Mayfield (5), and Charles Mayfield (2). It looked like my James Mayfield's father's first name was William, Thomas, James, or Charles living in one of eight Tennessee counties.

After narrowing down the list of counties, you can compile priority lists for the counties and names which will have the highest chance of being your ancestor. Now the systematic search into county records can be done in priority order, rather than blanketing the entire state.

Use the Computer

Most of the U.S. census records (1790-1930) have been indexed; each census page has been scanned and made available on CD-ROM or the Internet.

See a
Comprehensive set
of census index
CDs on pages
23, 70, and 71

Government Land Office (GLO) lands sales exist today, including the case files and a copy of the original patent. In just the past few months, the patents have all been scanned and the images made available on the Internet by the successor of the GLO, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

For every state, it is now possible to search for a surname to find an original owner of land. This index to patents is a place finder, and could lead to subsequent county land records for the same piece of property. For example, go to the BLM Web site at www.glorerecords.blm.gov/PatentSearch/Default.asp? to find a name in Indiana, such as James Johnson. There will be 206 entries for a James Johnson. Each of these entries can be looked at in more detail, and for most, a facsimile copy of the patent can be

printed. If nothing else, you will learn an exact legal description of the property. That means the property site can be located precisely on a map, and with this information, you can search subsequent land records for that same property in the courthouse of the county wherein the land was located. The first owner of land received a patent from the federal government, which was also kept as a GLO record copy. But when the same parcel of land was sold by the original owner, it was handled at the local level through the use of a deed. So, a logical next step is to use the deed indexes at the county level as place finders.

Deed Indexes

One of the best ways to locate an ancestor in county records is to use a county's deed indexes. From evidence of a land patent issued to an original owner of a parcel of land, or after using censuses, directories, master name lists, etc., as a means of finding a state of residence, the next step is to narrow down the list of counties. You may not get to the right county in the first steps, but left with just a few counties to search, deed indexes provide the means of locating the right county without spending more time than is necessary in "needle in the haystack" searching.

DOCUMENT No.	GRANTOR	GRANTEE	Date	Location
Camp, Sheldon, et al	Hollook, Luke	17 510	Q. C. Mar.	28-1874-East Mount
Camp, Siles, et al	Hepson, William T.	17 827	Mar. June	14-1874
al	Benedict, Burton	17 840	" Dec.	5-1874
al	Barnes, Curtis	16 468	Q. C. "	16-1828-East Mount
r H, et al	Campbell, Suzanne	15 487	Q. C. June	6-1825
es, et al	Campbell, Suzanne	15 487	Q. C. "	6-1825
in	Sagor, Joseph	17 664	Mar. "	12-1876
l, et al	Campbell, Suzanne	15 488	Q. C. Aug.	20-1825

Above is an index to deeds for the grantors (sellers) sometimes called a "Direct Index," found in virtually every courthouse in America.

A Checklist for Deed Research

There are three ways you can conduct deed research.

1. Research in person at the courthouse. The best way is to travel to the county courthouse and read the deed books yourself. But the next best way is to find a person familiar with that county's records who can do the research for you. Try contacting a local genealogical society to see if there is a person who can visit the courthouse on your behalf.
2. Research by mail. A county's register of deed records may look in a deed index for you if your request is concise and to the point. Write the keeper of deeds and ask them to check the Grantor/Grantee Index for evidence of your ancestor's name during a period of about twenty years, enclosing a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope (SASE).
3. Research microfilm copies of the deeds. After checking online at www.familysearch.org for evidence of microfilmed deed indexes, the same site will tell you where the nearest Family History Center is located and where microfilm can be ordered and used on interlibrary loan from the FHL in Salt Lake City.

Steps to take and things to keep in mind:

- 3 A county must be known first. Since deeds are recorded at the county level, you must have at least a clue as to the county where your ancestor lived. The exceptions are Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont, where deeds are recorded at the Town level; and in Alaska, the only state without counties, where deeds are recorded at the Judicial District level.
- 3 Come prepared with census or tax lists to find the name of the neighbors of your ancestor. It helps to have the names of other people who you know lived near your ancestor. This is a way of confirming that you are in the right place, by looking for the other names in the same area. In some cases, reading the deeds for neighbors may turn up your ancestor's name as a witness, confirming you are in the right county.

Here are three reasons why a search in a deed index should be the first place to look in county records:

1. Over 90 percent of the adult white males in America before 1860 owned land. (That figure is still over 50 percent today). There are few genealogical sources that give you a ninety percent chance of finding a name, but you have that going for you when you know that one of your ancestors lived in a particular county. If you check the deed indexes for a county in which an ancestor lived, there is a 90 percent chance his name is listed there, and, by the same token, if you check the deed indexes for a county and your ancestor's name is not listed, there is a 90 percent chance that he did not live there. Checking deed indexes for a number of counties is not an overwhelming job, so they provide the fastest way to find a specific county where a person lived.
2. Complete sets of deed indexes exist in every county of the United States except Alaska (the only state with no counties, and where

deeds were recorded at one of four judicial districts; and deeds were recorded at the town level in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont). And, there are fewer lost or destroyed deeds than for any other type of county record. If a courthouse burned to the ground, for example, it is rare that you will ever find birth records, death records, probate records, or practically any other kind of record up to the day of the fire. The exception is deed records, which were often restored, reentered, and brought up to date for all owners of property within a county. Why is this? Deeds are a written proof of ownership of land, always recorded at a courthouse. This comes from the way people do business. As it turns out, if an original deed were ever destroyed at the courthouse, a land owner would soon take a copy of a deed back to the register of deeds and have it recorded again. That is, a land owner would do this if they ever had thoughts of selling the property. Probably 99.9 percent of all the old deeds were recorded at

a courthouse. (Even today, it would be nearly impossible to sell a piece of property without a recorded deed). And, the deeds are all indexed by the name of the seller and the name of the buyer. Finally, deed records are more complete than any other court record, and they go back further in time than any other type of record of genealogical value. (England's land records go back to 1086; Denmark's land records go back to 900 AD). And, in any U.S. county, deed records are in existence from the first year that county was formed.

3. Deed indexes are the easiest county records to search because they are better organized. Deed indexes are usually contained in large, cumulative index books, some covering up to 30-40 years in one book. Compared to marriage indexes, which are almost always organized with one index per year, a deed index for over 100 years can be searched more quickly for evidence of a particular name. As a result, it is possible to search deed indexes for a number of counties in a shorter period of time.

- 3 Start with the Grantor/Grantee index. A grantor is a seller, a grantee is a buyer. Deeds may be indexed as a "direct index," (sellers listed in a loose alphabetical order by surname); or as an "indirect, or "inverted" index," (buyers list), but virtually all deed indexes are organized to show both the seller and the buyer. Write down the name, date, deed book, and page number for every deed indexed. If you are looking for a William Johnson and know that he had a brother, Thomas Johnson, it may be important to look for all siblings deeds as well.

- 3 In addition to your ancestor's full name, look for "et al" after the same surname in the index ("et al" is latin for "and others"), which may indicate a group of heirs. This was used as a short-cut for a clerk writing a deed index entry in which there was more than one person named as the grantor or grantee, and appears as "Thomas Johnson, et al."

- 3 Read each deed. Note that each will give the residence for the grantor and the grantee—this is valuable information. Before 1900, deeds usually give the county or town of residence, but today you can find an exact street address for both the grantor and grantee, right down to the zip code.

- 3 Locate the Probate Court office at the same time you are in a courthouse. You may come across a reference to a probate in a deed. The relationship between deeds and probates is that deeds to heirs may be recorded as a result of a probate court Judgment. In some cases, you may find a reference to a probate case file number in a deed transcript, which is a back-door index to the probate files in the same courthouse.

- 3 Locate the Civil Court office at the same time you are in a courthouse. Before 1850, the subject of most lawsuits in America had something to do with land disputes. A deed transcript may give you a back-door index to a civil court case and may even give you a case file number.

- 3 Get a USGS (7.5 series) Topographical map of the area, or see if the County Engineer's office has detailed county maps available. You will need a map that shows watercourses (in the State Land States) and Range/Township lines (in the Public Land States) to identify the exact location of the land described in a deed.

Using a process of elimination, or just using some intelligent guessing, a search of the deed indexes for a number of counties is the way you can zero in on the right county. If nothing else, land records can confirm that you are in the right county for finding other records. But reading the deeds can often reveal genealogical information you would never expect. So, after you find an indexed deed of interest, you need to go to the deed books and read the full text of the deed itself.

Deed indexes for over 1,500 counties of the U.S. have been microfilmed and are available at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. Coverage of counties east of the Mississippi River is 100 percent complete. The way to find a deed index is to go to the www.familysearch.org site and use their online library catalog. Use a county name for a search, then "Land Records" to find the deed index books.

Topographic Maps

Once a county of residence is known, a starting point for research may be a map. If a genealogist can identify and plot a place of residence as an exact point on the ground, genealogical research can become systematic and logical. For every genealogical event, the ideal is to identify a place/jurisdiction with a latitude/longitude description, so a map can be used to highlight that specific site. But, a property description obtained from a patent or deed can be used to precisely locate the old family farm on a detailed topographic map, the best map for genealogical research.

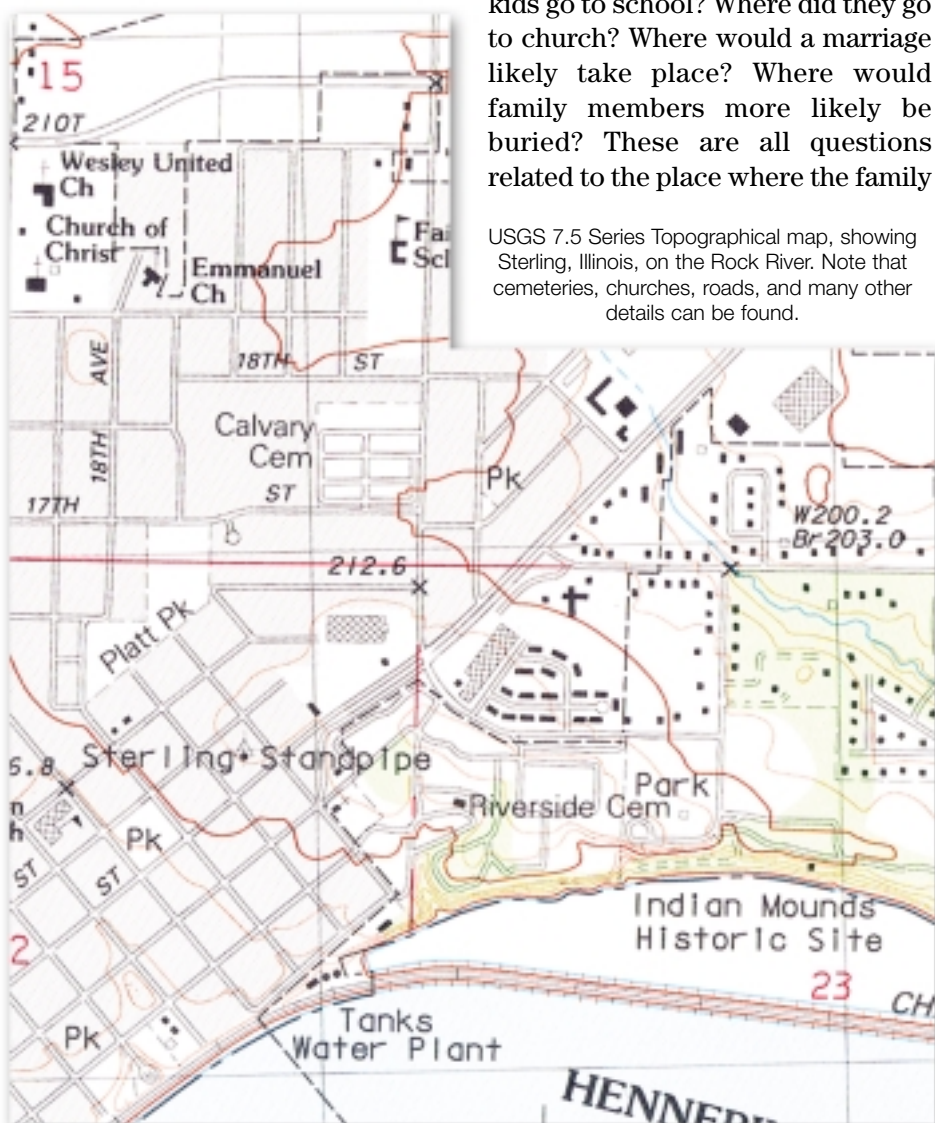
There are topographical maps readily available from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), for example, where it is possible to trace the property lines of a tract of land as small as five acres in size. Such large-scale Topo maps are very

important for showing details and names of water courses, man-made objects and buildings, mountains, valleys, roads, etc. For land found in the state land states where the property descriptions are in metes and bounds, the land is almost always described with a starting point of a water course. With a map showing all water courses, the details of the property description can be plotted. And, in the public land states, where the land descriptions are from the Rectangular Land System, a Range/Township property description can be traced as well.

After "X" marks the spot on the map where your ancestor's land lies,

start a basic genealogical research sequence. For example, once the "X" is located precisely, the map will immediately raise some important questions. Where is the nearest road to the site? Where are the closest churches to that site? Where is the nearest cemetery? Is the site close to the county seat, or is it closer to the county seat in the adjoining county? Is there a river separating the site from the county seat? This "place oriented" approach to prioritizing your research means you locate the exact place on the ground, then try to put yourself in the time and place your ancestor lived there. What means of transportation was there? Where did the kids go to school? Where did they go to church? Where would a marriage likely take place? Where would family members more likely be buried? These are all questions related to the place where the family

USGS 7.5 Series Topographical map, showing Sterling, Illinois, on the Rock River. Note that cemeteries, churches, roads, and many other details can be found.



lived. Thus, the lay of the land dictated how they lived, and more importantly for genealogical research, where they conducted the business of their lives, and where the events of their lives were ever recorded on paper.

The best detailed maps available to genealogists are those that enlarge a small area on the ground and show every man-made object, such as buildings in towns, churches, cemeteries, and roads. Natural features such as mountains, hills, streams, and valleys are also important in understanding the lay of the land in enough detail to visualize the place where an ancestor lived. Clearly, the United States

Denver CO 80225. Or call 1-888-ASK-USGS, or visit their Web site for ordering maps at <http://mapping.usgs.gov/esic/prices/maps.html>

Geographic Names Information System

For the past several years, the USGS has been extracting place names from maps and entering them into computers. Their goal has been to produce the *National Gazetteer of the United States*, an alphabetized listing of every named place or topographic feature that exists in the United States. The Gazetteer has not yet been published by the USGS. However, OmniGraphics, Inc., of Detroit, Michigan published an early

of place names. USGS calls this database the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS). Recently, the huge GNIS place-name index was added to the USGS Internet site, so it is now possible to search for a place by name from the nearly two million place names in the United States. The URL to access the GNIS search for a place name is as follows: <http://mapping.usgs.gov/www/gnis/gnisform.html>.

Once you have located a place from the GNIS, you may display and print a map at various scales. The maps are not nearly as good as the printed sheets available through the mail, but they do offer a good look at any region of the U.S., and the service is free.

Land Ownership Maps

Your ancestor's name may appear on a map as a land owner. Thousands of land ownership maps were produced by private companies, most during the period 1870-1920, but in some areas such as New York's Hudson River Valley, land ownership maps go back to the 1790s. For the farmland areas of America, these land ownership maps are still being produced in great numbers.

The best collection of the old maps is at the Library of Congress (www.loc.gov), where you can obtain copies of any map they hold. The fifty state libraries are a good source for locating many of the old land ownership atlases that still exist, or a local library may have copies of such old atlases for their immediate area.

There are two published guides for learning what land ownership maps are available at the Library of Congress. Write to Library of Congress, Photoduplication Services, Washington, DC 20540. Ask for a price quote to make copies of Land Ownership Maps for the county in which you have an interest. Specify a time period and part of a county

The search screen for the huge online GNIS place-name index.

Geological Survey (USGS) is the best source for detailed maps, called topographic maps, and every genealogist should own copies of these maps showing an area where an ancestor once lived. USGS has available an index booklet for each of the fifty states. In addition, a single sheet index map is available. The 7.5 series maps give the most detail, because they are produced at a scale of 1:24,000 and depending on the location on the globe, cover about 6-7 miles across and 8-9 miles deep. Called a "quadrangle," each topographic map sheet is printed in seven colors on the world's largest printing press. To obtain free map indexes and catalogs, and to order topographic maps or any of the wide variety of thematic maps available from the USGS, contact: USGS Information Services, Box 25286,

version of this phase I database in eleven volumes. Seen mostly in larger libraries, the cost to purchase the printed *OmniGraphics* gazetteer is over \$1,200. But the same list of place names can be now be accessed for no charge on the Internet.

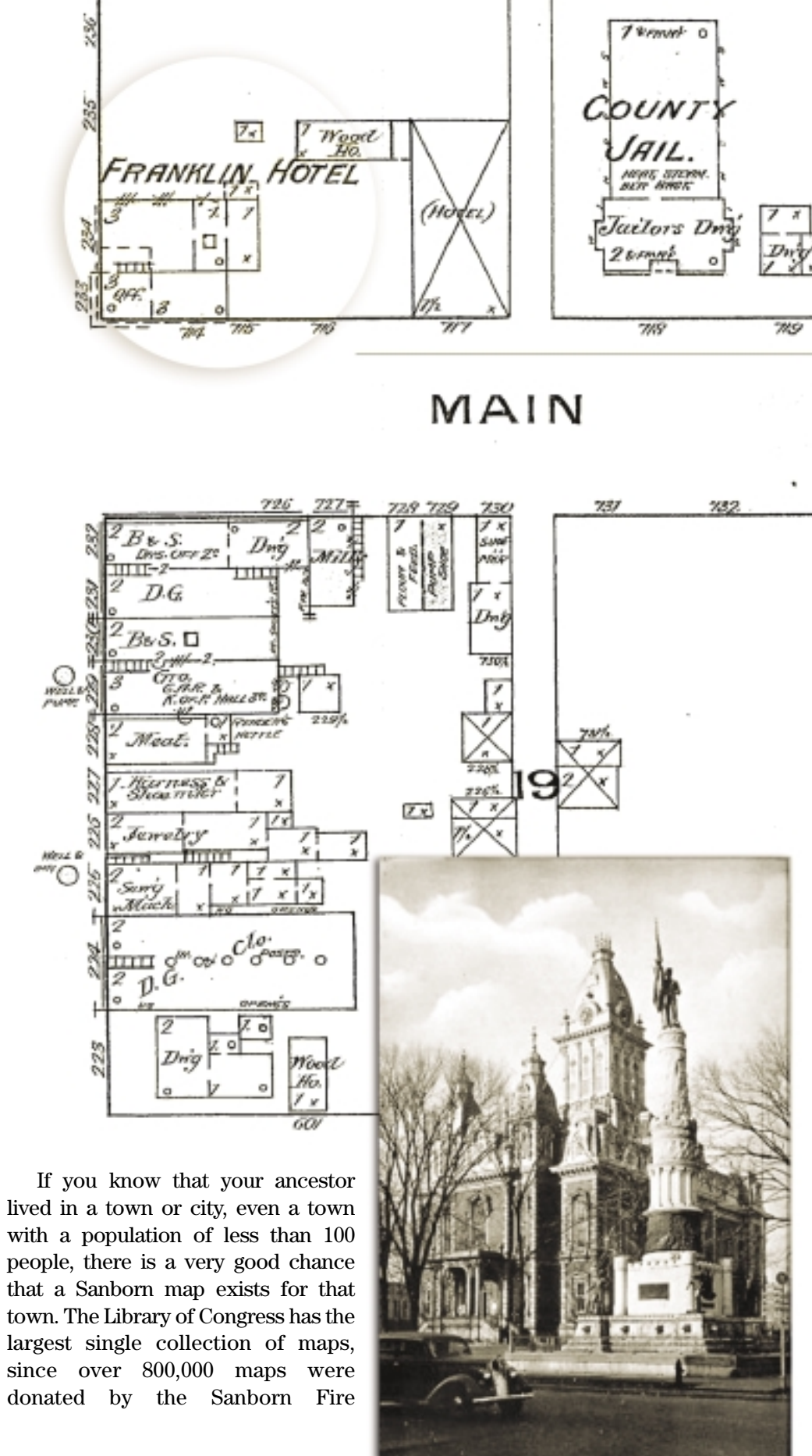
Phase I of the gazetteer project was to extract the place-names from the 7.5 series maps, which is now complete for all fifty states and all U.S. possessions. Phase II of the project is well under way, which adds place-names from historical maps, post office maps, old road maps, old gazetteers, and any other known place-name source. Only a few states have been completed through the phase II stage.

Even though the project is not completed yet, the names that have been compiled and computerized so far comprise an enormous database

(township, town, or area), such as "Northeast Corner," or "Township 36 North, Range 2 West." In your letter, refer to the book that lists the single-sheet manuscript maps in existence: Richard W. Stephenson, *Land Ownership Maps: A Checklist of Nineteenth Century County Maps in the Library of Congress*, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1967). Also mention the multi-volume guide that lists the many county atlases that have been produced: *Geographic Atlases in the Library of Congress*, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1967). The technique in writing to the Library of Congress is to assume that they have what you want. Write a letter asking for a quote to make copies of any land ownership maps available for places and time periods specified. You will then receive a letter outlining what maps exist and what the cost will be to make copies.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

Since 1851, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company of Pelham, New York, has produced over one million street maps of virtually every town and city in the United States. The maps were drawn at a scale sufficient to show every building in a town, building construction (wood, stone, brick, etc), property lot lines, all streets and alleys, location of water lines, and the location of fire stations. The purpose of the maps was for rating fire insurance for any building in any town in America. Sanborn sold the maps to other fire insurance companies, and to city halls, fire halls, and many other buyers. From about 1875-1935, these maps were in many cases the only city maps being produced. And, for most cities, the maps were updated regularly, and a series of maps may cover several years.



If you know that your ancestor lived in a town or city, even a town with a population of less than 100 people, there is a very good chance that a Sanborn map exists for that town. The Library of Congress has the largest single collection of maps, since over 800,000 maps were donated by the Sanborn Fire



Winchester, Indiana

The 1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance map of Winchester, Indiana (left page) shows the town-center featuring the Franklin House. We found a picture of the Franklin House (above) ca. 1880. The photo on the left is the Randolph County Courthouse, ca. 1930, and it is also on this map (not shown).

Insurance Company. But many of these maps can be found in public libraries, city halls, fire halls, and colleges all over the country. Noteworthy is the map library of the California State University Northridge, which has one of the largest collections of original Fire Insurance Maps, with particular emphasis on the western states. Visit the Northridge Web site for more information about their collection of Sanborn Fire Insurance maps at <http://maplibrary.csun.edu/Sanborn/SanDes.html>.

There are two published guide books: 1) *Fire Insurance Maps in the Library of Congress*, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress); and 2) *Union List of Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps Held by Institutions in the United States and*

Canada, (Eugene, OR: Western Association of Map Libraries), 2 Vols. Mention the first book when writing to the Library of Congress and requesting copies to be made of the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps for a town in which you have an interest. The second book is more difficult to find, but if you are near a college map library, a copy of the *Union List* can usually be found there. If you know a street address for your ancestor in the town, you should provide that information in your request to the Library of Congress. You will be quoted a price to make copies. If a family were living in a town, a genealogist can usually obtain a street address by locating the family in the 1850 through 1930 censuses. City directories are also a good way to obtain a street address for a person.

In most towns, the Sanborn maps were drawn at a scale of 1 inch = 50 feet, which allowed enough detail to show an outline of every house in a town, as well as an outhouse in the back of the house. These maps are often a secret source to bottle collectors, because they can scale the exact location of where an outhouse was on the property, and that is where they dig for old bottles. (This could be an example of getting up close and personal with your ancestors.)

A huge collection of Sanborn Fire Insurance maps have been digitized and made available online. However, the ProQuest Web site is not open to the public, but is a service paid for by libraries, archives, and institutions. This is the same service provider of the HeritageQuest Online census images, but it is not always the case that a library that subscribes to the HQ Online data also subscribes to the other ProQuest databases. To see the online Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, contact local libraries in your area to see if they are subscribers to this service. You may have to visit the site by using the in-house computers located at the library. (A handful of the subscribing libraries allow remote access to their library card holders).

William Dollarhide, raised and educated in Seattle, formerly an associate architect at Western Washington University is currently a writer with Heritage Creations, residing in Salt Lake City. A genealogist since 1971, he started the Dollarhide Systems for Genealogical Records in 1980. In 1984 he founded the *Genealogy Bulletin*, now a 48-page Heritage Creations publication. In addition to his duties with the *Bulletin*, he writes monographs relating to genealogy. He is the author of eight books, three of which were published by Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc: *Managing a Genealogical Project*; *Genealogy Starter Kit*; and with William Thorndale, *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920*. Since 1994 he has authored five books published by Heritage Quest: *Map Guide to American Migration Routes, 1735-1815*; *British Origins of American Colonists, 1629-1775*; *The Census Book: A Genealogist's Guide to Federal Census Facts, Schedules, and Indexes*; *Grow a Family Tree!*; and with Ronald Bremer, *America's Best Genealogy Resource Centers*.