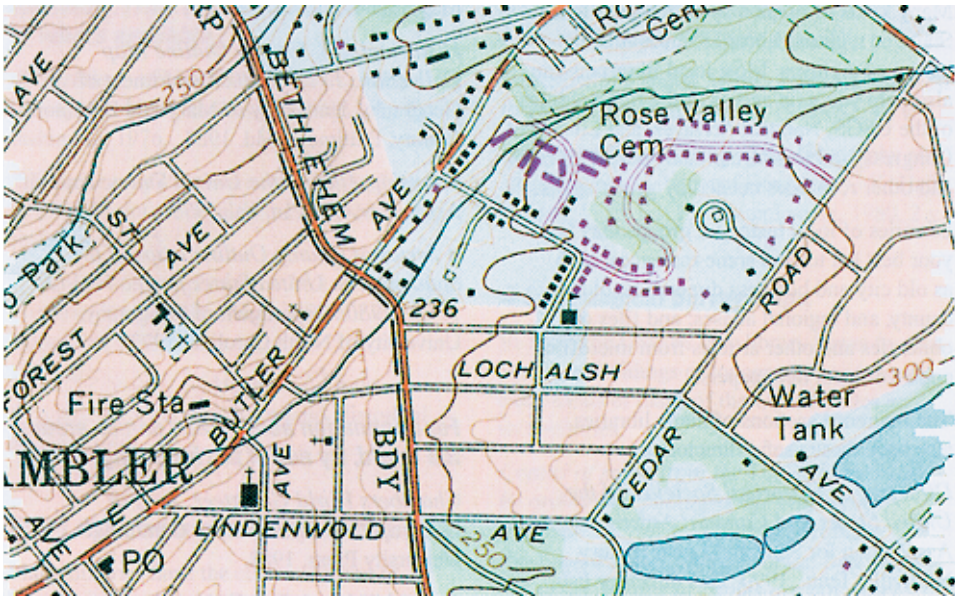
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Using Maps in Genealogy



Getting Started

Maps are one of the many sources you may need to complete a family tree.

In genealogical research, maps can provide clues to where our ancestors may have lived and where to look for written records about them. Beginners should master basic genealogical research techniques before starting to use topographic maps.

Introductory books on genealogy suggest timesaving ways to plan, gather, organize, and record findings.

To learn basic genealogical research techniques, it's best to start with the most concise, easy-to-read books, gazetteers, articles, pamphlets, and other sources that apply directly to the kind of research you plan to do.

Books on the shelves of your local library may not include those that will best serve your purpose. However, many libraries and bookstores have the latest edition of *Books in Print*. Its subject guide gives the titles, authors, publishers, and prices of hundreds of books on genealogy.

Many libraries also have directories that give the names and addresses of local, State, regional, and national associations of genealogists, historians, and ethnic groups.

You may also find a copy of the pamphlet *Where to Write for Birth, Death, Divorce, and Marriage Records*. If not, you can purchase a copy from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

Finally, online searching on terms such as "genealogy" through any of the major World Wide Web search engines (including www.yahoo.com, www.excite.com, and www.infoseek.com) or online bookstores can direct you to Web sites and other resources that can help.

How Maps Can Be Useful

Once you've gathered as many facts about family history and customs as possible, turn to maps to uncover more specific information or to solve historical "mysteries."

Old and new maps can help you track down facts about a branch of your family. How? In the United States, birth, death, property, and some other kinds of records are normally kept by the county governments. If you can name the place where an ancestor lived, new or old maps of that place may also show the county seat where useful data about your kin can be obtained.

Old maps can be particularly useful in this regard because pinpointing the name of the place where an ancestor lived can be like trying to hit a moving target. Many towns, counties, cities, and even countries have experienced numerous name changes over the years. Though their names have changed, some of these places may be noted on an old map. The location of some others may be found in sources such as lists of abandoned post offices, local histories, government records, microfilm records, or clippings from old newspapers, old city directories, or old county atlases kept in the library archives of a town, city, or county in the region.

If you find unfamiliar place names during your search, the U. S. Geological Survey can help.

The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is the Nation's official data base of place names. The GNIS is maintained by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and can often provide information on name changes. This data base contains 2 million entries, including the names of places that no longer exist, as well as variant names for existing places.

This automated system also contains the names of every type of feature except roads and highways. It is especially useful for genealogical research because it contains entries for communities, as well as for churches and cemeteries, even those that no longer exist.

To use this free service, e-mail: gnis_manager@usgs.gov, telephone 703-648-4544, or write to U.S. Geological Survey, Geographic Names, 523 National Center, Reston, VA 20192. You can also visit the GNIS Web site at geonames.usgs.gov.

Constantly changing place names are not the only challenge; the boundaries of many political jurisdictions where early Americans lived have changed one or more times. Some American families lived in the same locale for hundreds of years. Yet, their homes may have been swapped back and forth a number of times between different political jurisdictions—towns, provinces, States, or countries.

This can greatly complicate your work. In one case, for example, the place where a family lived for the entire 19th century was at various times part of seven different counties. In such a case, you might have to query all seven courthouses to obtain data needed about members of the family. Records or copies of records were rarely acquired by a succeeding county.

Similar but even more complex problems arise when you must search for personal records in

the archives of faraway lands. The names and boundaries of countries seem to be forever in flux, and many public and private record centers disappear or move from place to place.

Finding the Right Maps

To find useful maps, you must have strong clues as to where and when your ancestors lived.

The best maps for your purpose are ones that:

- show in great detail an area around the place where your relative lived;
- show its location within a county or other jurisdiction; and
- name and show the borders of neighboring areas

A plat book in a town hall or county courthouse or an old fire insurance map may show an outline of your ancestor's house and its placement on you ancestor's property.

Such maps should help you picture where your relatives were born, resided, attended school, worked, shopped, voted, traveled over land or water, courted, married, raised families, and were laid to rest. You may need later maps of the same area or other places to track down ensuing generations.

Maps usually suggest some patterns of settlement and movement and rule out others. For example, topographic and other relief maps may show hills or mountains that impeded migration or access to certain areas. Rivers bridged now may not have been bridged when kin lived nearby. Yet, a river can aid migratory travel because sometimes it is easier to travel on water than through dense forests and undergrowth, and it is even possible that your ancestors traveled by waterway to market, to attend church or school, or to pursue a host of other interests.

Maps covering larger areas may suggest various kinds of trade, employment, and social, recreational, or other interactions among the peoples of neighboring towns, settlements, or other locales. Analysis of such maps may expand the scope of research beyond nearby county, State, provincial, or national boundaries.

Gathering Other Resources

Once you've used maps to identify the most likely place names for your ancestors' homes, try a local library or historical society to find atlases, gazetteers, local directories, and other sources that pertain to locales of interest.

Many kinds of maps may be found at local, State, or regional libraries, museums, or historical archives. Most local librarians can also help you gain access to the rich holdings of the USGS, National Archives, and the Library of Congress, and to international sources of maps and other resources needed by genealogists.

Libraries of local historical groups may be your best bet to find some resources, such as old city and business directories; old city, county, and regional atlases; and files of obituaries and other articles from microfilm copies of local newspapers.

The reference sections of many libraries also have these useful directories:

Directory of Historical Societies of the United States and Canada: American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, Tenn., 1990. This directory lists about 1,000 sources in a genealogy index.

Official Museum Directory [American Association of Museums]: National Register Publishing Company, Wilmette, Ill., 1989

Your local librarian may also be able to suggest someone who has access to sources such as *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790—1920*: Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 1988. This 445-page book shows all U.S. county boundaries from 1790 to 1920. On each of the nearly 400 maps, old county lines are superimposed over modern ones to highlight boundary changes in 10-year intervals.

Separate books or papers have been published about the "genealogy" of each of a large number of States, counties, and other areas.

For example, *Abstracts of the Earliest Wills Upon Record in the County of Suffolk, Massachusetts*: Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 1984.

Surnames in Ireland, Special Report On [together with] Varieties and Synonyms of Surnames and Christian Names in Ireland: Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 2 v., indexed, 1901, 1909 (reprinted 1988).

Historical atlases can also prove useful.

A Genealogical and Historical Atlas of the United States of America: Everton Publishers, Logan, Utah, 1976.

Atlas of American History: Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1943, 294 p.

Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries 1788—1980: G. K. Hall, Boston, Mass. 1984, 5 v.

Historical U. S. County Outline Map Collection 1840—1980: Department of Geography, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Baltimore, MD. 1984.

Township Atlas of the United States: Androit Associates, McLean, Va., 1979.

A Series of County Outline maps of Southeastern United States of the Period 1790—1980: Department of Geography, University of North Carolina, 1973.

For information about place names around the world, try any of the following:

Chambers World Gazetteer: A—Z of Geographical Information: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World: Columbia University Press and J.B. Lippincott, 1962.

Gazetteers and Glossaries of Geographical Names of the Member Countries of the United Nations and the Agencies in Relationship with the United Nations: Bibliography, 1946—1976: Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1984.

Names on the Globe: Oxford University Press, New York, 1975.

Parish Maps of the Counties of England and Wales, Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies, Logan, Utah: Everton, 1977.

Shtetl Finder: Jewish Communities in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries in the Pale of Settlement of Russia and Poland, and in Lithuania, Latvia, Galicia, and Bukovina, with Names of Residents: Heritage Books, Bowie, MD., 1989.

For national place name reference help, try the following:

Biography of Place-Name Literature, United States and Canada: American Library Association, Chicago, 1982, 3d ed.

National Gazetteer of the United States of America, Concise 1990, U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 1200-US: U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1990.

Geographic Names and the Federal Government: A Bibliography: Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress, 1990.

Webster's New Geographical Dictionary: G. &. C. Merriam, Springfield, Mass., 1988.

For help with place-name research by State, consult publications such as the following. (This is just a small sampling of what's available.)

A Gazetteer of Maryland and Delaware [1904] (reprint): Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, 1976.

A Gazetteer of Virginia and West Virginia [1904] (reprint) Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, 1975.

A list of Places Included in 19th Century Virginia Directories: Virginia State Library, Richmond, 1981.

The Placenames of Maryland. Their Origin and Meaning: Maryland Historical Society, 1984.

Some directories of map collections:

Many libraries have the current edition of *The Map Catalog*: Vantage Press, a division of Random House, New York, 1990. This handbook describes features and sources of a worldwide range of new and old maps, atlases, and related products. It has sections on researching old maps, history maps, maps of the United States and of foreign countries, State, and provincial maps, county maps, urban maps, city plans, boundary maps, census maps, railroad maps, topographic maps, and many other kinds of maps.

World Mapping Today: Butterworths, London, 1987. A large, 583-page book that describes the mapping programs of each country in the world and gives the names and addresses of each country's principal mapping agencies. Section 4 on Map Evaluation provides information on how to interpret and use maps.

Map Collections in the United States and Canada: A Directory: Special Libraries Association, New York, 1984, 4th ed.

Guide to U.S. Map Resources, 2 ed,: American Library Association, Chicago, 1990.

Directory of Canadian Map Collections/ Repertoire des Collections de Cartes Canadiennes; Association of Canadian Map Libraries, 1980, 4th ed.

World Directory of Map Collections, compiled by the Section of Geography and Map Libraries, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions: K.G. Saur, Munich, 1986.

Some map bibliographies:

Historical Geography of the United States: A Guide to Information Sources: Gale Research, Detroit, 1982, (see especially p.3—51).

Checklist of Printed Maps of the Middle West to 1900: G.K. Hall, Boston, 1981—82, 14 v.

Bibliography on Cartography, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress: G. K. Hall, Boston, 1973, 5 v First Supplement, 1980, 2 v.

U.S. Geological Survey maps:

In 1879, The USGS's new library began to accumulate its holding of topographic and many other kinds of maps of the United States and its territories.

Copies of maps from the USGS library can be ordered as photographic enlargements from roll microfilm of out-of-print maps of the United States, its territories, and outlying areas. Scales of copies are not exact.

To order a photocopy of a map in the Survey's library, contact any Earth Science Information Center or call 1-888-ASK-USGS and describe the kind of map you are seeking as completely as you can.

You can order current USGS maps directly from the Survey or from a local map dealer.

The USGS publishes and updates the following maps:

- More than 55,000 large-scale topographic maps (1:24,000, 1:25,000 and 1:20,000 for Puerto Rico) that together show most local areas of the United States and its territories, with the exception of Alaska's 2,400 maps at 1:63,360. Each map names and shows in fairly rich detail every settled area and other features within the map's boundaries.

- Topographic maps of selected counties at scales of 1:50,000 or 1:100,000.

You can purchase these and other USGS maps from the USGS or a local map dealer.

For each State, the USGS publishes an *Index to Topographic and Other Map Coverage and [State] Catalog of Topographic and other Published Maps [all scales]*. To obtain a free index and catalog for one or more States, contact any Earth Science Information Center or call 1-888-ASK-USGS.

Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress.

This Division holds and has direct access to almost 4 million maps, 51,000 atlases, 8,000 reference works, and a large number of related materials in other formats.

The Division draws on these vast resources to provide cartographic and geographic information to Federal and local governments, the scholarly community, and the public. No single catalog includes the Division's total holdings, but card and book catalogs provide access to its collections.

The atlas collection includes representative volumes of all significant publishers of atlases over the past five centuries. The atlases cover individual continents, countries, states, counties, cities and other geographic regions, as well as the world. They range in scope from general to topical.

Of major interest to genealogists are land ownership records kept by Federal, State, county, and local government agencies. A good source for early county maps is *Land Ownership Maps: A Checklist of Nineteenth Century United States County Maps in the Library of Congress*, 1967.

Old and new large- and small-scale planimetric, topographic, and other kinds of maps are available for every part of the United States and for most other areas of the world.

Among the many county maps and city and town plans are some 700,000 large-scale Sanborn fire insurance maps. Since 1867, the firm has issued and periodically updated detailed plans of 12,000 U.S. cities and towns. Some areas are represented by as many as eight different editions. This collection is an unrivaled cartographic and historic record of America's urban settlement and growth over more than a century.

Reference services through the Library of Congress:

Reference service is available to the public in the Geographic and Map Reading Room in Washington, D.C., and by telephone or correspondence.

The collections in the Geographic and Map Reading Room are for reference use only. Maps and atlases are not available for sale or free distribution.

The Geography and Map Division will respond to requests that cannot be answered by a library or other source in your locality. In many cases, the Division can tell you the present name of a place where you believed an ancestor once lived, and sometimes it can suggest places where vital and other records about your ancestor may be on file. It is not possible, however, for the Division to undertake extensive research projects or to assist students in preparing term papers, bibliographies, or other academic assignments.

Geography and Map Reading Room at the Library of Congress:

This large reading room is open to the public Monday—Friday (8:30 a.m.—5 p.m.). It is in Room LM B01 of the Library of Congress James Madison Memorial Building, 101 Independence Avenue, SE., Washington, D.C.

In the reading room, geographic and cartographic bibliographies, reference books, gazetteers, and current issues of cartographic journals are readily available for consultation.

Acquiring photocopies of maps and plates:

Subject to copyrights and other restrictions, photocopies of maps and plates from atlases may be ordered through the Library's Photoduplication Service. Two free brochures are also available:

(1) Geography and Map Division, the Library of Congress

(2) List of Publications, Geography and Map Division

Look for them in your library or order copies from:

Geography and Map Division
Library of Congress
Washington, DC 20540-4650

Another helpful Library of Congress publication is *The Geography and Map Division: A Guide to its Collections and Services*. This booklet describes some noteworthy items in the Library's collection. You can order it (specify stock number 030-004-00015-9) from:

Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20402

Cartographic and Architectural Branch, National Archives:

The National Archives is the official repository for noncurrent, permanently valuable records produced by the Federal Government since 1774, including almost 2 million maps. If your library does not have a copy of the free pamphlet, *Cartographic and Architectural Branch*, you can order it (specify General Information Leaflet #26) from:

Publications Sales Branch
National Archives
8th and Pennsylvania Ave., NW.
Washington, DC 20408
202-501-5235

The National Archives also offers the *Guide to Genealogical Research at the National Archives*. This 304-page illustrated guide was revised in 1985. Chapter 20 on Cartographic Records describes holdings of the National Archives that are of special value to genealogist:

- Census Records: census enumeration maps, enumeration district descriptions, and civil division outline maps.
- General Land Office Records: township survey plats and U.S. land district maps.
- Military Records: manuscript, annotated, and printed maps, plans, and charts compiled or collected by various military organizations.
- Other Cartographic Records: small-scale civil division maps, postal route maps, USGS topographic quadrangle maps, area and county soil maps, tax assessment maps, maps relating to captured and abandoned property, and maps pertaining to American Indians.

This guide can be ordered from the Publications Sales Branch of the National Archives or from:

National Archives Trust Fund
NEPS Dept. 735
P.O. Box 100793
Atlanta, GA 30384
(hardcover $25, plus $3 postage).

Other National Archive publications about cartographic records:

Civil War Maps, 1964

List of Selected Maps of States and Territories, 1971.

Records and Policies of the Post Office Department Relating to Place Names, 1975.

Cartographic Records Relating to American Indians, 1974 . . . the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1977. . .the Territory of Iowa 1836–1848, 1971. . . the Territory of Wisconsin 1836–1846, 1970.

List of Cartographic Records of the General Land Office, 1964.

Pre-Federal Maps In the National Archives: An Annotated List, 1975.

Transportation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Survey of the Cartographic Records in the National Archives of the United States, 1975.

Preliminary Inventory of the Cartographic Records of the Bureau of the Census, 1958.

Followup Hints:

Directories and pamphlets are only general guides, but they will help direct you to the right map collection to suit your needs.

In making inquiries, give as much information as possible. Try to provide the State, county, and town or township; the publisher, year, and place of publication; and the edition of the map or volume of maps. Specify the kind of information that you want on the map and the approximate area of coverage.

The map researcher will then be able to indicate if that map—or one like it—exists in that particular collection.

Acknowledgments:

The U.S. Geological Survey would like to thank the following for their assistance:

J.B. Post, "Maps for Genealogists," Special Libraries Association G&M Bulletin, No. 143, March 1986, New York.

Ronald E. Grim, Reference and Bibliography Section, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Genealogical Publishing Company
1001 N. Calvert Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Riley Moffat, "Genealogy and Maps: Some Reference Sources," Western Association of Map Libraries Information Bulletin, v.12, no. 1, Nov. 1980, Santa Barbara Calif.

More Information:

For information on other USGS products and services, call 1-888-ASK-USGS, or visit the general interest publications Web site on mapping, geography, and related topics at erg.usgs.gov/isb/pubs/pubslists/.

For additional information, visit the ask.usgs.gov Web site or the USGS home page at www.usgs.gov.