

City and Town Directories

By Howard Maynard Faulkner

From as early as the late 1700's through the mid 1900's *City* and larger *Town Directories* were prepared annually primarily to assist commerce. They were most popular from about the mid 1800's. Large cities may have had more than one directory, published by different companies, (competition I expect to see which could produce the better product?).

These directories usually had several sections. The first listed all businesses by name, location, number of employees, ownership information, products/services provided and some indication of size and/or output. Frequently advertising of the business was given if the firm wished to pay for it, and most did. The second listing included individuals in the community, (usually by head of household and often others in the dwelling were also listed....related or otherwise). The residents were identified as *owner, tenant, boarder* or *family member*. The street addresses were given and when available telephone numbers, employment, and occasionally other useful or interesting information. Residential information was usually cross-referenced by street name and number.

City directories have long been used by genealogists to fill in missing information or to gather business and residence information about ancestors. They are especially helpful in providing details for the missing 1890 census. Usually deaths that occurred the previous year were reported.

I have used these directories extensively to locate not only places of residence of early family members but to learn about occupations, etc. BUT, occasionally I have learned much more than expected. For example, it was reported that my maternal grandfather owned the first truck in the city he lived in. My paternal grandfather, who was listed as a 'hairdresser' for 12 years then he was listed as a 'barber' for another 18 years, his brother worked with him the first year he was in business then he was *gone*, (wouldn't you like to know why?). This grandfather lived in the same city for over 45 years, but moved at least 16 times. My father was listed with his parents until the age of 17. I found he lived with his employer and his wife in the same city for a couple of years until he went to college. (*This must have been a great friendship as Dad chose the given name of his employer for me*). Some years later I located a city directory in another state which listed my grandfather Faulkner's' brother as a druggist. The advertisement for the business indicated, "*A physician always in the store*". Further research indicated he had graduated from medical school.

City directories are usually found in libraries, city offices, and historical societies. However, large collections of city directories are available from the following resources.

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), some in regional centers but also in DC
Library of Congress in DC

Family History Library at Salt Lake City (Mostly from 1927-1932)

Brigham Young University Library (Utah)

State Libraries of most all states

Helpful Online sites include but are not limited to: www.uscitydirectories.com,
<http://olddirectorysearch.com>, www.distantcousin.com, www.loc.gov/rr/microform/uscity/,
www.ancestry.com, www.Footnote.com, <http://www.cyndislist.com/>

Now go see what gems you can uncover. Happy Hunting!