

URBAN MAPPING TOOLS

A BCG SPONSORED LEGACY FAMILY TREE WEBINAR

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OVERVIEW

This webinar suggests strategies to correlate large amounts of information often developed in urban research, with a significant emphasis on the use of cartographic resources. Generally, when researching in urban settings we have an abundance of sources to consider. Many times, the challenge is to connect and analyze multiple, even overwhelming, amounts of information. A variety of resources will be discussed, especially, cadastral maps (land ownership), fire insurance maps and city directories.

For more information on this topic researchers can review Chapter 20, “Urban Research,” of *The Source*, by Loretto Dennis Szucs and John M. Scroggins (#33 in the bibliography). *Genealogical Resources in New York* by Guzik (#6) describes the scope of resources available in one large urban setting. Below are some suggestions on dealing with several common urban sources to include city directories and maps.

USING MAPS IN GENEALOGY

Maps can be used for variety of genealogical purposes. We can locate and visualize ancestors in time and place, locate boundaries, towns, and geographical features. Often, we plat land. Maps are useful to follow family groups and identify migration routes. Sometimes, we build house histories and discover the social context of our ancestors. Perhaps the most powerful use is as a correlation tool. The presentation will generally demonstrate some of these uses and will generally follow the handout. However, there will be excursions for examples.

THE TOOLS

REAL ESTATE MAPS/CADASTRAL MAPS/LAND OWNERSHIP MAPS/

A good starting place to understand mapping resources for urban areas is the Real Estate Maps section in the Library of Congress research guide, “Real Estate Industry: A Resource Guide” (url below). Some of the notable publishers of these kinds of maps include G.M. Hopkins, L.J. Richards, G.W. Bromley, William Perris, and G.W. Baist. These real estate atlases show property owners and property boundaries.

Real estate maps are part of a broader category of land ownership maps. These include the county atlas, military maps, and other maps that have ownership information, though that was not the purpose of the map. Some of these maps be useful for urban research. See the research guide, “American Women: Resources from the Geography and Map Collections” (url below).

FIRE INSURANCE MAPS

The largest and most complete collection of fire insurance maps is the Sanborn Map Collection held by the Geography and Map Division (G&M) of the Library of Congress (LoC). These maps were published over multiple years from the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Maps were created for over 12,000 cities in United States, Canada, Cuba, and Mexico. The G&M collection consists of over 700,000 maps of which over 400,000 are online. The online collection consists mostly of the pre-1922 maps and other maps up to 1960 for which the copyright was not renewed. As the copyright expires on the post-1922 maps, they will be added to the collection. As of this writing some of the maps from 1923–1926 have not been scanned.

Sanborn maps are useful for creating house histories and many other genealogical applications. The genealogical application of these maps is most powerful when they are correlated with other tools such as cadastral maps (landownership), deeds, census information, and city directories. We can follow changes in a neighborhood or even an individual property over time.

There is a guide to this collection, “Fire Insurance Maps in the Library of Congress: A Resource Guide.” Another outstanding tool from G&M is the “Sanborn Atlas Volume Finder.” Use this tool to find a volume that covers a specific area of geographic interest. City Finders for Washington, DC, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and several other large cities are available. For a similar city finder for the cities of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and more Pennsylvania urban areas consult the cartographic department of [PennState University Libraries](#). The Resource Guide also provides links to other GIS projects involving Sanborn Maps.

Though Sanborn dominated the fire insurance map business there were other vendors. One example is Ernest Hexamer & Son. He began mapping Philadelphia in 1857. Some of these maps are online at LoC. See also the collection online at the [Free, Library of Philadelphia](#). However, by 1915 the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company had acquired virtually all of its competitors to include the map business held by Ernest Hexamer. There is a downloadable pdf file describing the holdings of the LoC that were created by other fire insurance map companies [here](#).

There are a variety of links to various resources for Sanborn maps listed below. Start with [Fire Insurance Maps in the Library of Congress: A Resource Guide](#).

CITY DIRECTORIES – STRATEGIES TO LOCATE CITY DIRECTORIES

As with many record sources in today’s environment, city directories exist in a variety of formats—principally original paper book form, microform, or digital. Large collections of original directories exist in the usual places: Library of Congress, Allen County Public Library, and the New York Public Library. FamilySearch has a useful handout “City Directories: More than Names and Addresses” that discusses both the use of directories in research and identifies providers (url below).

CITY DIRECTORIES – STRATEGIES TO EXTRACT DATA FROM CITY DIRECTORIES

Chapter 8 of *The Source*, “Directories,” by Gordon L. Remington (#33), provides an excellent discussion of the types of directories and suggests strategies to employ them. See especially his discussion of methodologies to use directories with specific types of records. Remington identifies nine different kinds of directories: city, telephone, business, law, medical, civil and

military service, professional, religious, and postal. The rest of this discussion focuses mainly on city directories.

Generally, a city directory has two main sections, residences, and businesses, plus the advertisements that make it profitable. Most directories also include sections on government, churches, public institutions, benevolent societies, schools, and a street directory. The following practices represent a systematic process for getting the most out of a city directory.

- Note and record the publication data. Sometimes there are competing publications.
- Note the type of directory.
- Note the cutoff date for information.
- Note the definition of abbreviations. This information is most often found at the beginning of the residence section.
- Read the introduction for any information that the publisher thought important enough to bring to the reader's attention.
- Take a very liberal view of potential spellings. For small directories or names beginning with letters less frequently used for surnames, consider reading the entire letter section of the directory.
- Regardless of whether you have located the individual of interest in the residence section, if you know the occupation, proceed to the business section and search for the individual there.
- Check the errata or corrections page if you do not find an individual. This section may appear at the beginning or end of the volume.
- Check the index of advertisers. The individual may have been affluent enough to afford an ad for his business.
- If you know the name of a business and you do not find it in the business section, look in the residence section. For example, the name of a hotel may not be found in the business section because of the extra cost, but the name of the hotel and proprietor may be found in the residence section.
- Having located an address, plot it on a map and search for nearby churches. Return to the directory to find information on the denomination, address, and name of minister. Alternatively, copy the church section of the directory.
- Check the street directory for information to help locate the street of residence or business.
- Finally, take the time to scan the directory for insights into the community. Are there trends in advertising? What are the major industries? Are there ethnic newspapers?
- Search the newspapers using the data found in the directory.
- Extract the data on the individual of interest for *every possible year* that he or she could appear in the directory.
- Enter the data into a spreadsheet. This approach facilitates sorting and correlation. Researchers can see how "exhaustive" the research has been. See the article "Correlation: A Powerful Research Tool" by Shannon Green, CG (#4).

PANORAMIC MAPS 1847–1929

The [G&M collection](#) is extensive, numbering 1,520 items. Panoramic maps depict cities and towns in the U.S and Canada. New maps are episodically added to the collection. The places our ancestors worked and worshiped are shown on these maps. Sometimes we can even find the specific house they lived in. St Louis has an exceptional rendering of urban life (url below). Also, check out the LoC blog article [John Bachmann's Bird's Eye Views](#).

HISTORIC GIS APPLICATIONS – AN INTEGRATING AND CORRELATING TOOL

There are many new geographic information systems (GIS) emerging from a myriad of sources. A GIS application is a database of geographic information. Google Earth is an example of a large and very sophisticated GIS application. Essentially, GIS applications are databases of geographic data linked to myriad other data sometimes called layers. Computer programs allow a variety of options to display and analyze the data. Generally, many applications take the form of a base map display with the ability to overlay data linked to location. A historic GIS essentially links spatial data with historic data. Old maps are many times georeferenced to a base map such as Google Maps. Georeferencing is a process that uses GIS software to make the scanned image of an old map display in its proper geographical space in Google Maps or another digital map application.

Examples include applications that display census data, boundary information, historic maps, or information from archives. In fact, some specialized genealogical applications already exist, such as *Map My Family Tree*, and *Family Atlas*. If you have a tree on FamilySearch, check out their webpage “Where Are Your Ancestors From? Map Your Heritage with “[Where Am I From? Activity](#)”.

Many of these applications use tools developed by [ESRI](#). Some are fully developed GIS applications. Some use an ESRI tool called StoryMaps that requires a lower level of technical expertise to develop applications.

A selected variety of websites will be showcased (not all of those listed below will be covered). Some are simple integrated map layers, and some integrate a variety of resources. Some go further and provide sociological commentary that provides context to our ancestor’s lives.

COMPILATION OF WEBSITES

GENERAL RESOURCES

- *American Women: Resources from the Geography and Map Collections*, <https://guides.loc.gov/american-women-geography-and-map>.
- *FamilySearch: City Directories: More than Names and Addresses* https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/img_auth.php/e/e3/2015_City_Directory_Research.pdf.
- *Georeferencing: Moving Analog Maps into Modern-Day GIS*, <https://blogs.loc.gov/maps/category/big-data-and-visualization/>.
- *House History: A Guide to Uncovering the Stories of Local Buildings and Properties*, <https://guides.loc.gov/house-history>.
- *Immigration to the United States, 1789–1930*, <https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/immigration-to-the-united-states-1789-1930>. Select the genre then maps to see various maps relating to urban settlement. Some foreign cities are included.
- *Mapping Inequality : Redlining in New Deal America*, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=5/39.1/-94.58>. Area descriptions made by Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) between 1935 and 1940. The application makes

available both the maps with risk ratings and the area descriptions. These maps were often used to deny mortgages to “high risk” populations.

- *Real Estate Industry: A Resource Guide*, <https://guides.loc.gov/real-estate-industry-sources/introduction>.
- *USGS Historical Map Explorer*, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/topoexplorer/index.html>. Makes available the entire historic topographic map collection of the USGS (about 178,000 maps) in an easy-to-use interface.
- *Panoramic Maps*, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/panoramic-maps/about-this-collection/>.

CANADA

- *Toronto Historic Maps*, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=d38469bfb363441d98b21f239adfd0a3>.

MASSACHUSETTS

- *Adams Historical Timeline*, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e4e21980802a4072b635aa7c04fc8f44>. A StoryMap that presents the history of the town of Adams, Massachusetts.
- *Massachusetts Real Estate Atlas Digitization Project by the State Library*, <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-real-estate-atlas-digitization-project-by-the-state-library>.

NEW YORK CITY

- *Atlases of New York City*, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/atlases-of-new-york-city#/?tab=about>.
- *Spyglass on the Past: New York City 1836 and Today*, <https://story.maps.arcgis.com/apps/StorytellingSwipe/index.html?appid=97ae55e015774b7ea89fd0a52ca551c2&webmap=60a6d8d2ab754250918e7fc21d7ac999>.
- *Here's NYC's Immigration Patterns over 387 Years*, <https://www.6sqft.com/infographic-shows-387-years-of-immigration-patterns-in-nyc/>.
- *Digital Harlem: Everyday Life, 1915–1930*, <http://digitalharlem.org/>. Everyday life in Harlem, NYC.
- *Harlem in Disorder: A spatial History and violence in the Great Depression*, <https://1935harlemriot.org/map/>.
- *Jacob Riis: Revealing “How the Other Half Lives,”* <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jacob-riis/?locl=blogmap>. The photographic work of Jacob Riis presented as a LoC exhibition.
- *The Tenement-House Committee maps*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006629793/?locl=blogmap>. Maps of City of New York showing the distribution of principal nationalities by sanitary districts.

OHIO

- *Cleveland Historic Maps*, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=ddb0ee6134d64de4adaa3660308abfd>.
- *Engaging Columbus*, <https://engagingcolumbus.owu.edu/>. A consortium of Ohio universities brings together tools to learn about urban areas. Integrates atlases, photographs, census data, redlining data, and more using interactive maps and GIS applications.

- *Columbus Maps and Apps*, <https://columbus.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html>. An example of what one city has done with GIS tools. The Historic Maps layer is the most interesting to genealogists.

PHILADELPHIA

- *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*, <https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/>. Provides information on three centuries of Philadelphia buildings from 25 Philadelphia-area repositories. Material is available for over 266,000 projects and buildings. The collections are organized by buildings, architects, and locations.
- *The Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network (GPGN)*, <http://www.philageohistory.org/geohistory/>. GPGN is an application that integrates selected historic maps with *Google Maps* and provides source data such as city directories. Notable projects include “Historical Burial Places Map and Database” and “Mapping West Philadelphia.”

PITTSBURGH

- *Historic Pittsburgh*, <https://historicpittsburgh.org/>. This site is a comprehensive collection of published nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works, digital maps and images from the same era, and a comprehensive offering of archival finding aids for western Pennsylvania repositories
- *Pittsburgh Historic Maps*, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=63f24d1466f24695bf9dfc5bf6828126>. This GIS tool is an application that takes the several thousand maps on *Historic Pittsburgh*, plus other maps of Allegheny County and layers them in a way that they can be examined and compared over time. One benefit of this approach is that it improves the access to thousands of maps on *Historic Pittsburgh* and provides the ability to correlate data on the maps.

SCOTLAND

- *Old Leith Rediscovered*, <http://oldleith.org/?fbclid=IwAR3ZTDk4oRb19fWjBLVbIsKnEZF4HpbksboSSeAKppPApIjigwykZ-b8b1U>. A project of the National Library of Ireland and others that integrates Ordnance Survey Maps of 1893, the Goad fire insurance maps of 1892, photographs, newspaper clippings, videos, and commentary into an interactive website. Remarkable work.

ST. LOUIS

- *Birds Eye St. Louis*, <https://blogs.loc.gov/maps/2022/04/pictorial-st-louis-the-great-metropolis-of-the-mississippi-valley/>.
- *Mapping Decline : St. Louis and the American City*, <http://mappingdecline.lib.uiowa.edu/>.

WASHINGTON, DC

- *Building a Neighborhood History*, <https://matthewbgilmore.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/building-and-neighborhood-history5.pdf>.
- *The City of Washington*, <https://www.loc.gov/ghe/cascade/index.html?appid=3084b0ebb9f94436ad8648c48e02284e&bookmark=The%20Capitol>. A history of Washington, DC drawn from the *US Serial Set*.
- *Civil War Washington: Historical Geography, GIS, and Civil War Washington*, <https://civilwardc.org/maps/>. An amazing integration of resources relating to Civil War

Washington. The application allows the visualization of a large urban area in a war time environment. Includes both interesting layers and access to specific data on many individuals.

- *Early Churches and Synagogues of Washington, DC*; <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/62ae296f4d9144c49253e126ebdda3be>.
- *HistoryQuest*, <https://dcgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2ab24bc3b6da4314b9f2c74b69190333>. Developed by DC's Historic Preservation Office, the GIS application presents historic data on extant DC buildings. Layers also include historic landmarks, historic districts, DC subdivisions, the original L'Enfant boundary, squares, and wards.
- *Visualizing DC's Municipal Infrastructure, 1890 to 2022*, <https://blogs.loc.gov/maps/2022/02/visualizing-dcs-municipal-infrastructure-1890-to-2022/>. Tells his LoC blog tells the story of twentieth century DC infrastructure using resources of the LoC and the DC Government [open data site](#).
- *Washington, DC History Resources*, <https://matthewbgilmore.wordpress.com/house-history/>.
- *Wymer's DC: Picturing Washington in the Mid-20th Century*, <https://www.wymersdc.com/>. This interactive map places thousands of historic images of photographer John P. Wymer onto Google Street View.

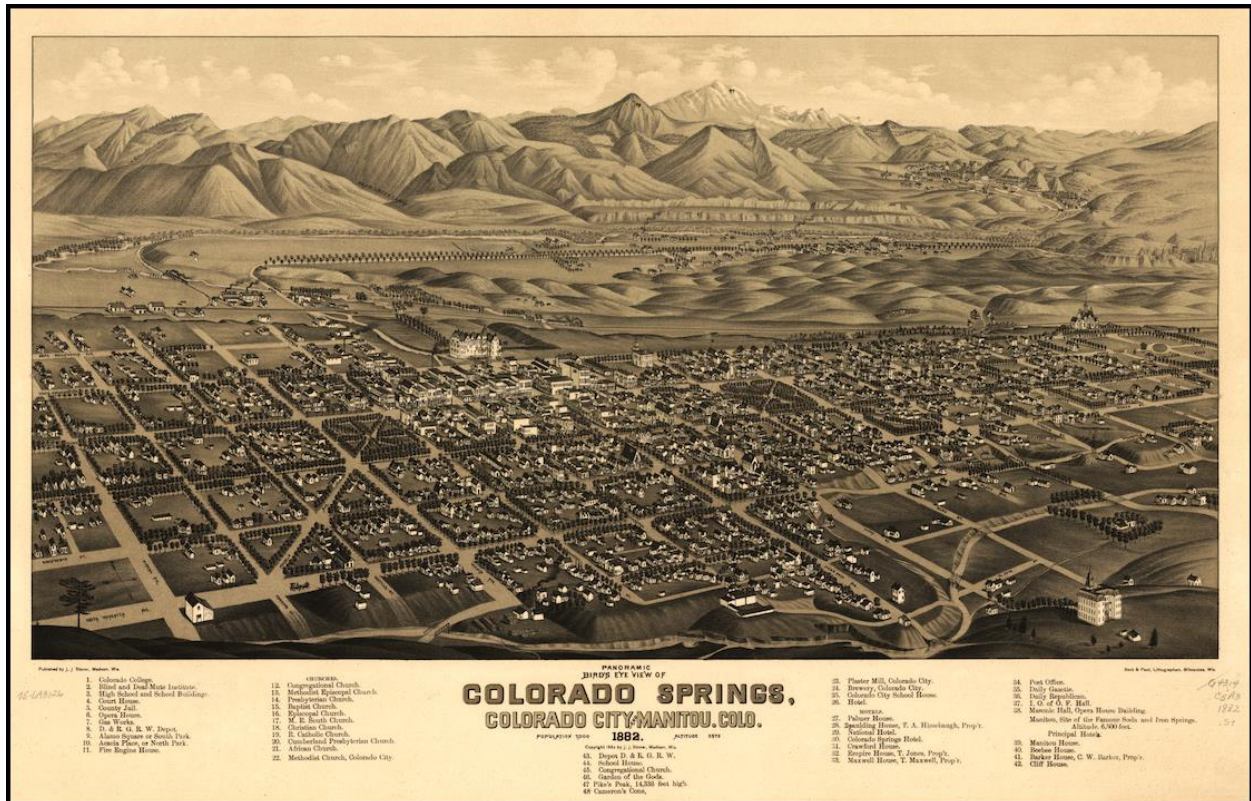


Figure 1: Colorado Springs, 1882, J.J. Stoner (Courtesy: Library of Congress, <https://ccn.loc.gov/75693126>)

FIRE INSURANCE MAP RESOURCES

- *Fire Insurance Maps in the Library of Congress: A Resource Guide*, <https://guides.loc.gov/fire-insurance-maps/introduction>.
- *Sanborn Map Finding Maps (Database)*, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/sanborn/>.
- *Non-Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps in the LoC*, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/pdf/fire-insurance-maps-non-sanborn.pdf>.
- *Penn State, University Libraries, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps*, <https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/sanborn-fire-insurance-maps>.
- *Sanborn Atlas Volume Finder*, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/instant/media/index.html?appid=0cb2c04324a0413081e1b793ea18f854&loclr=twmap>. Cities include Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York City (4 of the 5 boroughs), San Francisco, and Washington, DC.
- *Sanborn Internet Resources*, <https://guides.loc.gov/fire-insurance-maps/sanborn-resources>.
- *Sanborn Maps: Introduction to the Collection*, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-collection/?loclr=blogmap>.
- *Sanborn Maps of Milwaukee*, <https://webgis.uwm.edu/agsl/sanborn/>.
- *Freely Accessible Sanborn Maps Online (Database)*, <https://eresources.loc.gov/record=e1001653~S9>.

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All urls are current as 30 March 2023

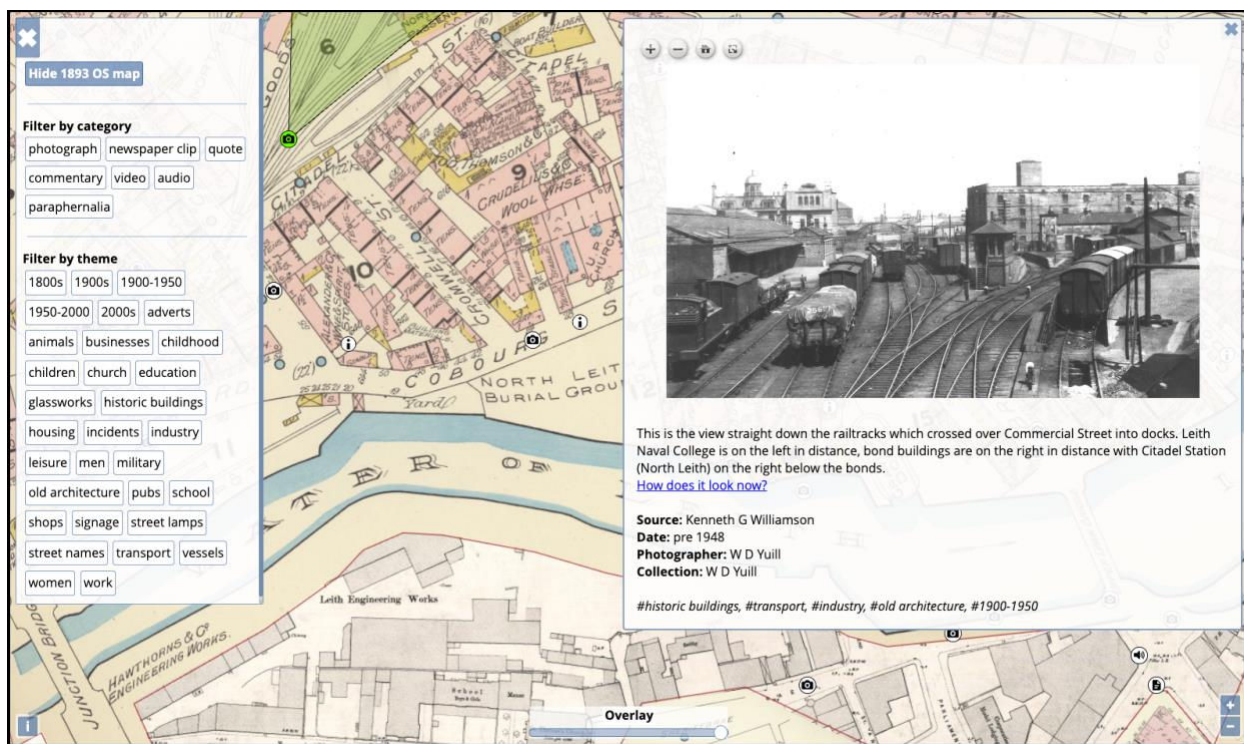


Figure 2: Old Leith Rediscovered,
<http://oldleith.org/?fbclid=IwAR3ZTDk4oRb19fWjBLVblsKnEZF4HpbksboSSeAKppPApIJigwykZ-b8b1U>
 (Courtesy Library of Scotland)