

A Deep Dive into U.S. City Directories at MyHeritage

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City directories are filled with information and clues that give insights into ancestors' lives and movements, can help you break down brick-walls, and give a broader understanding to the place that your ancestors' resided in. With over 25,000 city directories and 560 million records in MyHeritage's city directory collections, along with MyHeritage's unique search and display features, you can harness the information found in these directories in your genealogy research.

What are City Directories?

Directories started as lists in the late 1700s, originally intended to help businesses find clients and vice versa. These 'city directories' evolved to include personal name listings, essentially becoming a register of everyone living in a specific city, town, or county. Sometimes we find multiple towns or villages included in a single city directory, so that is important to keep in mind.

City directories are comprehensive registers, often broken down into three major components:

1. Residents
2. Businesses
3. Institutions

What you can find about an individual in a city directory

- Name
- Spouse
- Occupation
- Residential Address
- Employer

Using City Directories in Genealogy

Residential Addresses: One of the most important uses of city directories in genealogy is tracking our ancestors' addresses. With each annual or biennial edition, we can trace their movements over time. These addresses not only allow us to locate other geographically-organized records, like census or court documents, but they also prompt further research questions. Did our ancestor own their house or rent it? What does the house history reveal?

Family Relationships: City directories are also pivotal in helping us establish family relationships. Seeing a family's progression over a series of directories can reveal births, deaths, marriages, and other significant family events.

Occupation History: Our ancestors' occupational histories can often be traced through city directories. These listings, paired with census records and other sources, enable us to understand their work, economic status, and sometimes, their social standing.

Locating Other Records: City directories also assist in locating other records. For example, once we have an address from a directory, we can search for our ancestors in other records organized by address.

F. A. N. Research: Lastly, city directories are indispensable for F.A.N research - that's Friends, Associates, and Neighbors. By examining the people who lived near our ancestors, we might discover more about their community, social interactions, and possibly additional family connections.

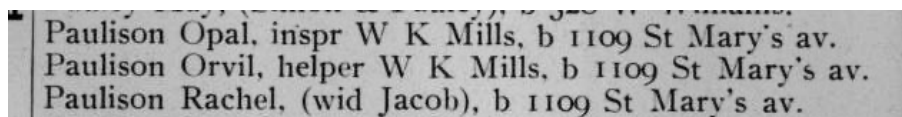
Abbreviations & Basic Elements

For most city directories, there is a key to abbreviations listed in the first few pages. Abbreviations differ between each directory. The most common ones include:

- **h.:** House or home, usually followed by resident's address.
- **b/bd/bds.:** Boards, indicating that the person is a boarder or lodger at the address.
- **c.:** Corner, also used in addresses to indicate the intersection of 2 streets.
- **r.:** Rear, a dwelling at the rear of a certain address (carriage house, etc.)
- **ab.:** Above, living above a store or other building
- **opp.:** Opposite, used to indicate a location across the street from a certain landmark or address.
- **blk.:** Block, indicates a certain block on a street.
- **occ.:** Occupation, followed by the person's job or profession.
- **wid.:** Widow, usually followed by the name of the deceased husband.
- **prop.:** Proprietor

Make sure that you watch for abbreviations of neighborhoods, street names, neighboring towns, and given names.

Here is an example from ***Fort Wayne City and Allen County Directory*** published by **R. L. Polk & Co.**, accessed at MyHeritage:



Here we can see that Opal, Orvil, Rachel Paulison were all boarders at 1109 St Mary's Avenue in Fort Wayne. Rachel was the widow of Jacob Paulison. Opal worked as an inspector for W. K. Mills. I know this because of the guide to abbreviations found in the directory.

Research

Search all records

Collection Catalog

Birth, Marriage & Death

Census records

Family trees

Newspapers

Immigration records

Hire a researcher

Census Helper™

How to Find and Search the City Directories on MyHeritage

There are two ways to find and search the city directories on MyHeritage.

1. Search All Records

You can do a general search by clicking “Search all records” under “Research”.

Search historical records

Explore your family history in MyHeritage's database of 19.4 billion historical records

First and middle name(s)

Jacob

Last name

Paulison

Year of birth

1829

Place

Fort Wayne, Allen, Indiana

Search

ADD DETAILS

Father

Mother

Spouse

Death

+ More

NARROW DOWN BY CATEGORY

All Collections

Directories, Guides & References	2
Birth, Marriage & Death	14
Public Records	2
Census & Voter Lists	16
Histories, Memories & Biographies	4
Family Trees	18
Books & Publications	12
Newspapers	21

After inputting the name, date of birth, and place (which can be any place of residence that your ancestor lived in), you will press “Search.” The webpage will then load a list of relevant records. You can then narrow down this list by category on the left side of the website with “Narrow Down by Category.” By choosing “Directories, Guides & References,” you can narrow it to those specific categories, including City Directories.

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MyHeritage's Technology for City Directories

Samuel M Paulison

In U.S. City Directories

Save this record and choose the information you want to add to your family tree

Save record

Name Samuel M Paulison

Residence Between 1908 and 1916
Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA

Address 1109 St Marys Avenue
[See who else lived at this address](#)

Residence status Homeowner

Spouse (implied) Raeהל

Marriage (implied) Between 1910 and 1912

Occupation Brakeman

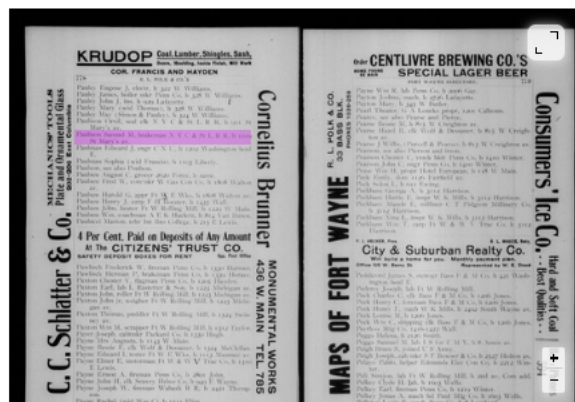
Workplace X Y C X St L R R



Records

YEAR	RECORD
1908	Paulison Samuel M, brakeman X Y C X St L R R, li 1 109 St Mary's av.
1910	Paulison Samuel M, brakeman N Y C & St L R R, h 1109 St Mary's av.
1912	Paulison Samuel M (Raeהל), brakeman X P R R, h 1109 St Mary's av.
1913	Paulison Samuel M (Raeהל), brakeman N P R R, h 1109 St Mary's av.
1914	Paulison Samuel M (Raeהל), brakeman N P R R, h 1109 St Mary's av.
1915	Paulison Samuel M (Raeהל), brakeman, h 1106 St Mary's av.
1916	Paulison Samuel M (Raeהל), brakeman, li 1109 St Mary's av.

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Source

PUBLICATION	PUBLISHER
Fort Wayne and Allen County, 1908	R L Polk & Co
Fort Wayne and Allen County, 1910	R L Polk & Co
Fort Wayne, Allen County, 1912	R L Polk & Co
Fort Wayne, Allen County, 1913	R L Polk & Co
Fort Wayne, Allen County, 1914	R L Polk & Co
Fort Wayne, Allen County, 1915	R L Polk & Co
Fort Wayne, Allen County, 1916	R L Polk & Co

Spotted an error? Suggest an alternative

The U.S. City Directories collection at MyHeritage is unique and groundbreaking for genealogy research, as it uses advanced machine learning technologies, developed specifically for the U.S. City Directories collection, to read, organize, and sort over 1.3 individual records. These records have been consolidated to reduce duplication to hundreds of millions of aggregated records, each featuring the same individual who lived in the same set of addresses during a span of years—making it easier to find all applicable city directory listings at once, rather than searching year after year. Additionally, MyHeritage's technology takes the information from each recording—including those found in abbreviations!—and displays them in an easy to read way.

On an individual record page you can find (where applicable):

- Name
- Residence (and dates of residence at that address)
- Residence status (homeowner, boarder, etc.)
- Implied Spouse
- Implied Marriage
- Occupation
- Workplace
- All the records corresponding to that individual at that address for multiple years
 - Ability to save the record to a family tree on MyHeritage
 - Ability to view other people who lived at that address.

Tips for City Directories and Your Research

- **Keep the Date in Mind:** Information listed in the directory was collected up to one year prior to the date listed on the cover.
- **Search Using Surnames:** Not only are city directories organized alphabetically by surname, but many given names could be abbreviated (“Wm” for William, Sm for Samuel, etc.).
- **Be Aware of Address and Street Name Changes:** Many cities, towns, and villages renamed the streets throughout history. Reconfiguration of address numbering and street grids/blocks was also common. These changes usually happened as they population grew, new residences were built, etc. An address listed in a 1915 directory may not correspond to the current address.
- **Understand Abbreviations and Table of Contents.** Utilize the list of abbreviations found in the front pages of the directory, and do not ignore the table of contents, as it will help you navigate the directory easier.