

# HISTORICAL MAPS: THE WORLD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Michael L. Strauss, AG-1207 S 2910 E. Spanish Fork, UT 84660

mlstrauss@genealogyresearchnetwork.com

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## INTRODUCTION

Maps have long been the favored choice for travelers. They serve to guide us to desired locations, and can enrich genealogists searching for their family history. From fire insurance maps that provide intricate details on the homes that our ancestors lived to road docket books that detail businesses and property owners along newly created roads.

## PANORAMIC MAPS:

These maps became a very popular form of cartographic mapping depicting both towns and cities landscapes from across the United States from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. They are sometimes also referred to as “*Bird Eye*” or “*Aero*” view maps. The maps were not photographs, but were renditions of the communities by drawing.

These maps are generally not drawn to scale; the maps typically show streets and roads; individual public buildings, houses, and business.

The largest collection of available panoramic maps for the United States exist at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. They are in the collection of the Map & Geography Reading Room (Room LM B01)-and online at [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

They are located in the basement of the Madison Building. All of the maps are scanned as high resolution and each is downloadable online in either .GIF, .JPG or .TIF format. Outside of the collections at the Library of Congress; individual archives and libraries should be consulted.

## SANBORN MAPS:

The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company was founded by David A. Sanborn (1827-1883) in 1867. He was trained as a surveyor when he started to work for the Aetna Insurance Company drawing maps. His company was founded to document properties in cities and towns across the United States for fire insurance purposes.

The largest collection of D.A. Sanborn maps is housed at the Library of Congress in the Maps & Geography Reading Room. Available to search online at [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov) Most are scanned and available online and searchable.

Many cities and smaller communities had multiple editions available printed both business purposes. The maps included businesses, homes, and other features are broken down on the maps that also provide details about the city streets, and the structures of the buildings whether they are brick, or frame in construction. Each of the Sanborn maps comes with a key (legend) to be able to tell what the various symbols used meant.

## ROAD DOCKET MAPS:

When properties were surveyed and new roads planned leading from one public road to another, it became necessary to petition the court to have a new survey performed on a roadway being considered.

Enterprising businessmen and residents petitioned the court to survey the entire length of the proposed road. Documents attached to the petition included rough drawings of the area in question, as well as names of the landowners along the path of the new road.

Also included were businesses located along the project's path-such as mills, taverns, and other public structures.

### **CADASTRAL MAPS:**

Historical maps became very popular during the nineteenth century. Several artists and surveyors showed their talent for drawing historical surveys of cities and towns all across the United States.

These maps are also called cadastral maps and are often very detailed with information about the land owners, number of acres, roads, streams, rivers, and other land areas.

Some of the artists included: F.W. Beers and Henry Bridgens among others with some showing great details. Consult the Library of Congress and each individual State Archives or Library for their own collection of historical atlases.

### **OTHER FIRE INSURANCE MAPS:**

Started by Ernest Hexamer who was a contemporary of David A. Sanborn. His maps date from the 1850s and give details much the same as Sanborn in his mapping.

Intended for the same purpose to detail Fire Insurance they eventually became known as Hexamer and Lochner (William Lochner) who drew many of the Philadelphia, PA and other major city maps that exist today.

Hexamer brought a son into the business and at one time was called Hexamer & Son. This business thrived for many years into the early twentieth century.

This collection has available numerous maps for Pennsylvania located at the Free Library of Philadelphia in addition to others that are found in the Library of Congress for other areas.

### **GAZETTEERS:**

A gazetteer is a geographical dictionary or directory that is often used with a map or atlas containing information about the geographical area, statistics, and physical features for any given region.

#### **Example::**

In 1832 and 1833 the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania published a gazetteer that covered the state. The author was Thomas Francis Gordon (1787-1860) who collected vital information about the state. Both editions are copyright free and available online at [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

There are other locations that have map collections of historical and genealogical value including;

[www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)  
[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)  
[www.davidramsey.com](http://www.davidramsey.com)  
[www.oldmapsonline.org](http://www.oldmapsonline.org)  
[www.historicmapworks.com](http://www.historicmapworks.com)

From the list of other sources above several of the websites do offer free viewing of the maps, but may charge to zoom in and other advanced feature.

### **ELECTION MAPS:**

Of genealogical interest were maps used for election information. Larger cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia were very large, that it became a necessary to have maps drawn detailing the voting boundaries.

These maps are a relatively untapped resource that is often ideal in determining the whereabouts of people in urban areas and work with city directories to find individuals in question

**Example:** Beginning in 1884, registered voters in New York City were listed in a supplemental record guide by street address and broken down into election and assembly districts. The corresponding maps show the boundaries of the districts by borough, making it relatively easy to find family in election records.

### **DRAFT REGISTRATIONS MAPS:**

Between 1917 and 1918 as the United States became actively engaged in World War approximately 24 million men (both aliens and native born residents) born between 1873 and 1900 were required to fill out draft registration cards.

In larger cities and communities maps were needed to show WWI draft board registration information. The maps were an important part on organizing the boundaries of larger cities to find someone who had registered. Consult the National Archives in College Park, MD or in Washington, DC for access to the maps.

### **CENSUS MAPS:**

These maps were created and drawn by the United States Census Bureau. Used primarily as a guide to locate ED's (Enumeration Districts) to find individuals on any given census. Census maps are very detailed as they contain the boundaries for each Census district to aid genealogists to find someone not easily located in the indexes even if their street address is known.

### **METES AND BOUNDS:**

This system uses physical features of the local geography, along with directions and distances, to define and describe the boundaries of a parcel of land. The boundaries are described working around the parcel in sequence, from a point of beginning, returning back to the same point.

### **PUBLIC LAND MAPPING:**

If your ancestors moved from any of the metes and bounds states they would have become familiar with the public land survey system. The thirty states formed from the public domain are AL, AK, AZ, AR, CA, CO, FL, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, LA, MI, MN, MS, MO, MT, NE, NV, NM, ND, OH, OK, OR, SD, UT, WA, WI, and WY. The original thirteen colonies, plus KY, ME, TN, TX, VT, and later WV, and HI formed the metes and bounds states. One of the biggest differences between land in the public land states and state land states is that public land was surveyed prior to being made available for purchase or homesteading, using the rectangular-survey system, otherwise known as the township-range system.

When a survey was done on new public land, two lines were run at right angles to each other through the territory - a base line running east and west and meridian line running north and south. The land was then divided into sections from the point of this intersection as follows:

#### *Township and Range:*

Townships, a major subdivision of public lands under the rectangular survey system, is standard to measure approximately six miles on a side (thirty-six square miles).

Townships are then numbered from the base line north and south and then from the meridian line east and west. The east/west identification is known as the Range. A Township is identified by this relationship to a base line and a principal meridian.

**Example:** Township 3 North, Range 9 West, 5th Principal Meridian

Identifies a specific township that is 3 tiers north from the base line and 9 tiers west (Range) of the 5th Principal Meridian

*Section Number:*

Townships were then further broken down into thirty-six sections of 640 acres each (one square mile) called sections, which were numbered with reference to the base line and meridian line.

*Aliquot Parts:*

Sections were then further subdivided into smaller pieces, such as halves and quarters, while still (generally) keeping the land in a square. Aliquot Parts were used to represent the exact subdivision of each such section of land. Halves of a Section (or subdivision thereof) are represented as N, S, E, and W (such as the north half of section 5).

Quarters of a Section (or subdivision thereof) are represented as NW, SW, NE, and SE (such as the northwest quarter of section 5). Sometimes, several Aliquot Parts are required to accurately describe a parcel of land.

Example: ESW denotes the east half of the southwest quarter of a section, containing 80 acres.

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ESW denotes the east half of the southwest quarter of a section, containing 80 acres. In general:

Township contains 23,040 acres

Section contains 640 acres

1/2 Section contains 320 acres

1/4 Section contains 160 acres

1/2 half of a quarter contains 80 acres

1/4 of a quarter contains 40 acres, etc.

A legal land description for the public land states might, for instance, be written as: the west half of the northwest quarter, section 8, township 38, range 24, containing 80 acres, usually abbreviated as W<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> of NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> 8=T38=R24, containing 80 acres.

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**NOTES:**