



## CITY DIRECTORY RESEARCH

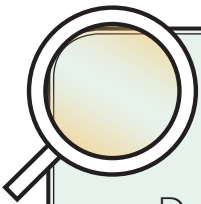


Historical  
Information  
Gatherers

## CITY DIRECTORIES

City directories are books that were published for populated areas that list building occupants, among other information. Some of these books date back to the 1800s. City directories have a section that lists street names in alphabetical or numerical order, and under each street name the addresses are listed numerically. Listing addresses in this way makes it easy to find out what company or person occupied a certain address in a particular year. When you look at a page in a city directory, you can see the addresses and occupants adjacent to each side of and across the street from the property you are investigating. In this way, you can make assumptions about what the properties were used for at the time the directory was published.

City directories were often published on an annual basis in urban areas. For this reason, city directories are often one of the best data sources available to establish a history of property occupants over time. This information can be used to assess whether any of the prior occupants could potentially have caused environmental problems due to releases of chemicals or petroleum products.



### CITY DIRECTORIES ARE GREAT FOR:

- Determining past occupants and property uses at regular intervals over a wide range of years.
- Assessing past property uses for possible environmental concerns.
- Estimating the location of a former building tenant, such as a dry cleaner located in a strip mall.

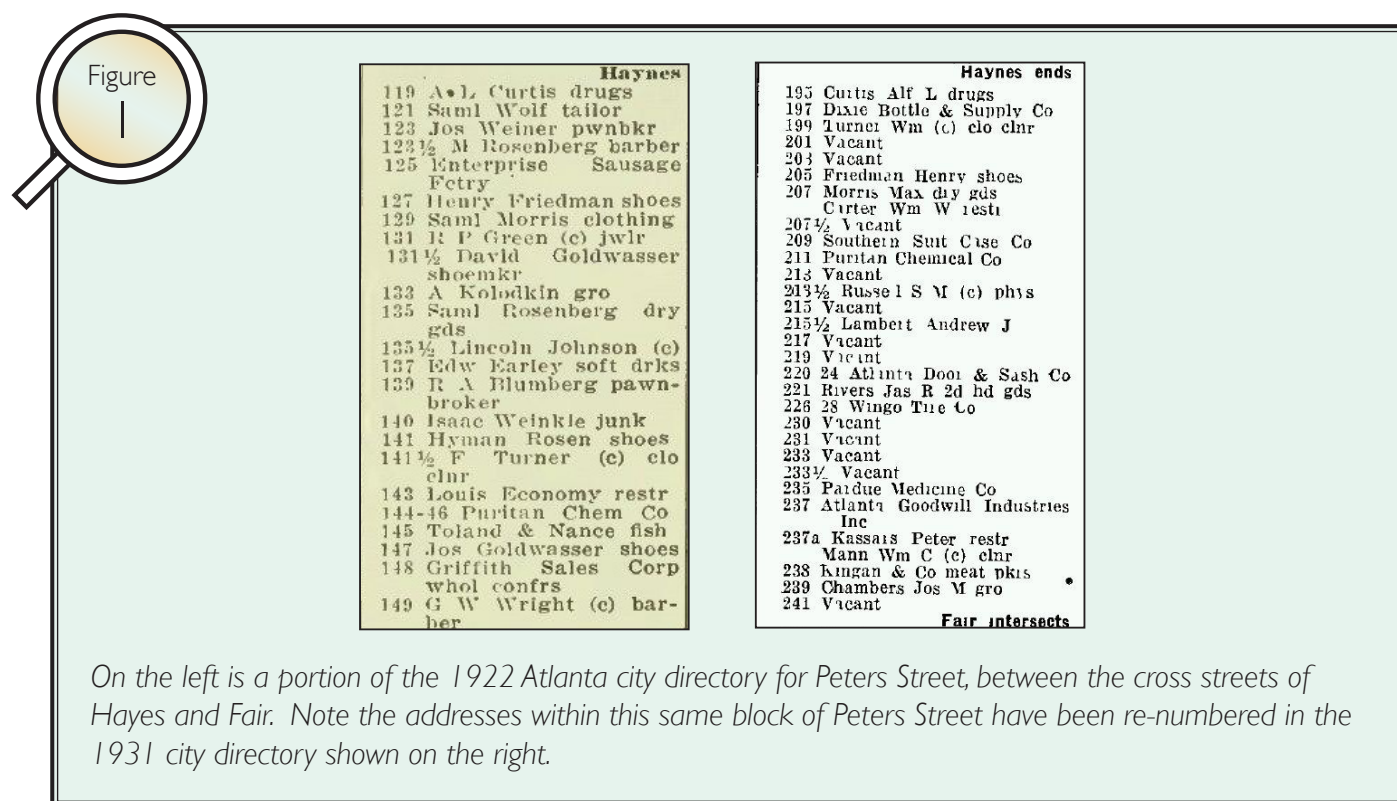
## CITY DIRECTORY RESEARCH TIPS

- Research all historical addresses for the property you are investigating.
- If your property occupies a corner, consider ordering city directory research for the cross street.
- If your property occupies any area where multiple properties may have once existed, request directory research for all streets that bound your property.

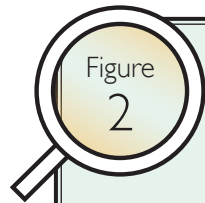
## BE AWARE THAT ADDRESSES CAN CHANGE OVER TIME

Property address changes can make city directory research challenging. Your property may be located on a street that has had a name change, or the number address for the property has changed. To be confident that your data provider understands these research challenges, ask questions about the limits of the research they conduct and how they identify address changes over time. This is important because you need to find past occupant information for both the current and former addresses for the property.

In some areas, complete renumbering of street addresses occurred in the past. The original address of 50 South 1st Street in 1925 may have been converted to 200 South 1st Street in 1955. Experienced researchers adept at conducting city directory research have procedures in place to make sure this is taken into account during the research process. **See Figure 1** for an example of how addresses changed on a street in Atlanta between the years 1922 and 1931.



Ask if your data provider attempts to identify street name changes. Some directories will tell you that a street name has changed. For example, a 1975 city directory listing for Martin Luther King Jr. Street may indicate, at the beginning of the street listing, “formerly Main Street.” The researcher should then research the property address on Main Street back in time. **See Figure 2** for an example of a street name change that occurred over 50 years ago and how that change needs to be considered when conducting city directory research in the present day.



**MARKET—S**

15\*White R&Co Agts  
 15\*Chicago Jt Bd Cloak &  
     Dress Wkrs Un  
 15\*Chgo Jnt Bd-Ladies  
     Garment Wkrs Un  
 25 Van Amburg L E  
 25\*Chodash Bros  
 25\*N Y Spangle Wks  
 27\*Lawrie J & Sons  
 27\*Bender I Inc  
 27\*Randall Mfg Co  
 33\*Wade Shirt Co  
 33\*Barnard&Miller  
 40\*System Auto Pks  
 101\*Ideal Mfg Co  
 101\*Rubin M J Inc  
 105\*Willy Button & Novelty  
     Company  
 107\*Supreme Textl  
 111\*Ace Merc Co  
 111\*Crown Merc Co  
 115\*325 Monroe Corp  
 115\*Calif Girl Sportswear  
     Company

**WACKER—S**

\*\*\*\* POSTAL ZONE 6 \*\*\*\*

1\*Liberty Mutual Ins  
     Companies  
 15\*ChgoJointBdCloak&Dress  
     Wkrs Internatl Ladies  
     Grmnt Wkrs Un  
 15\*Internatl Ladies Garment  
     Wkrs Un L-76  
 15\*Schwartz H W  
 15\*Russell-Hampton Company  
     Incorporated

On the left is a small portion of the 1953 Chicago city directory for the street named Market South. On the right is a small portion of the 1963 Chicago city directory for the same street, which has been re-named Wacker. In this case, the same listings are noted for 15 Market and 15 Wacker in both directories. To avoid missing important data about past site uses, make sure you work with experienced researchers who have procedures for identifying street name changes over time.



Request your data provider make the effort to research historical addresses associated with your property to make sure you get complete information. A property may currently be addressed on Elm Street but in the past may have been addressed on an adjacent cross street or even a parallel street across a now vacated alley. Historical addresses and former street names may be available from the property owner, from local building permit files or from reviewing historical plat maps, real estate atlases or fire insurance maps.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCHING SURROUNDING PROPERTIES

When requesting city directory research, make sure that your provider isn't just checking the address of your property. At a minimum, you'll probably want them to look at all adjoining properties. If you're in an urban area, it is helpful to know what was on the cross streets and the street running parallel behind your property because these adjoining properties are physically close to your property. If any of those adjoining properties have been contaminated, then the contaminated soil, groundwater or harmful vapors could impact your property. **Please see Figure 3** on the next page for an example of how surrounding properties of potential environmental concern can be identified by researching surrounding streets.

To better understand potential environmental risks, extend the city directory research beyond immediately adjacent properties. Use this information to identify if there was a gas station, dry cleaner or other potentially contaminated site near yours. Why? Past use by such occupants in the area could have caused subsurface contamination that may migrate to your property via groundwater or vapors.

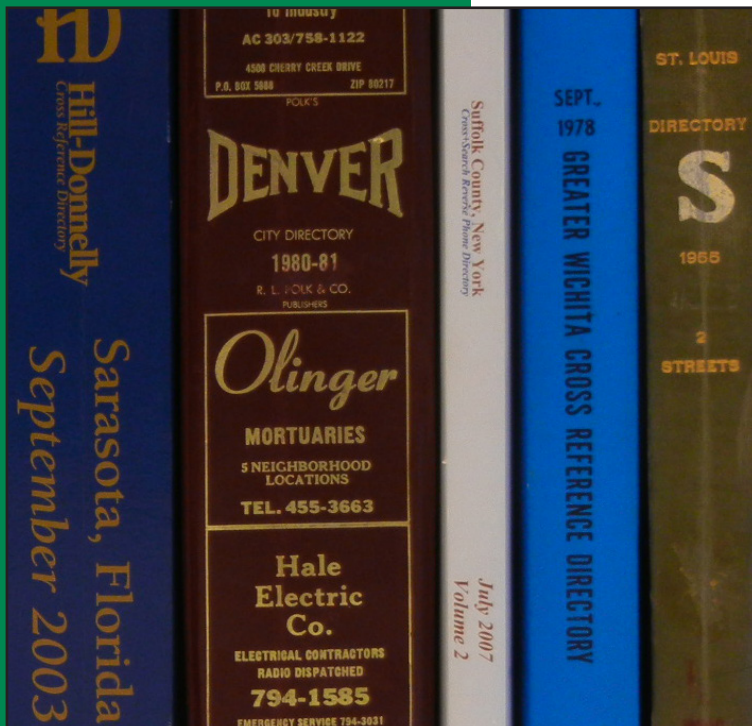
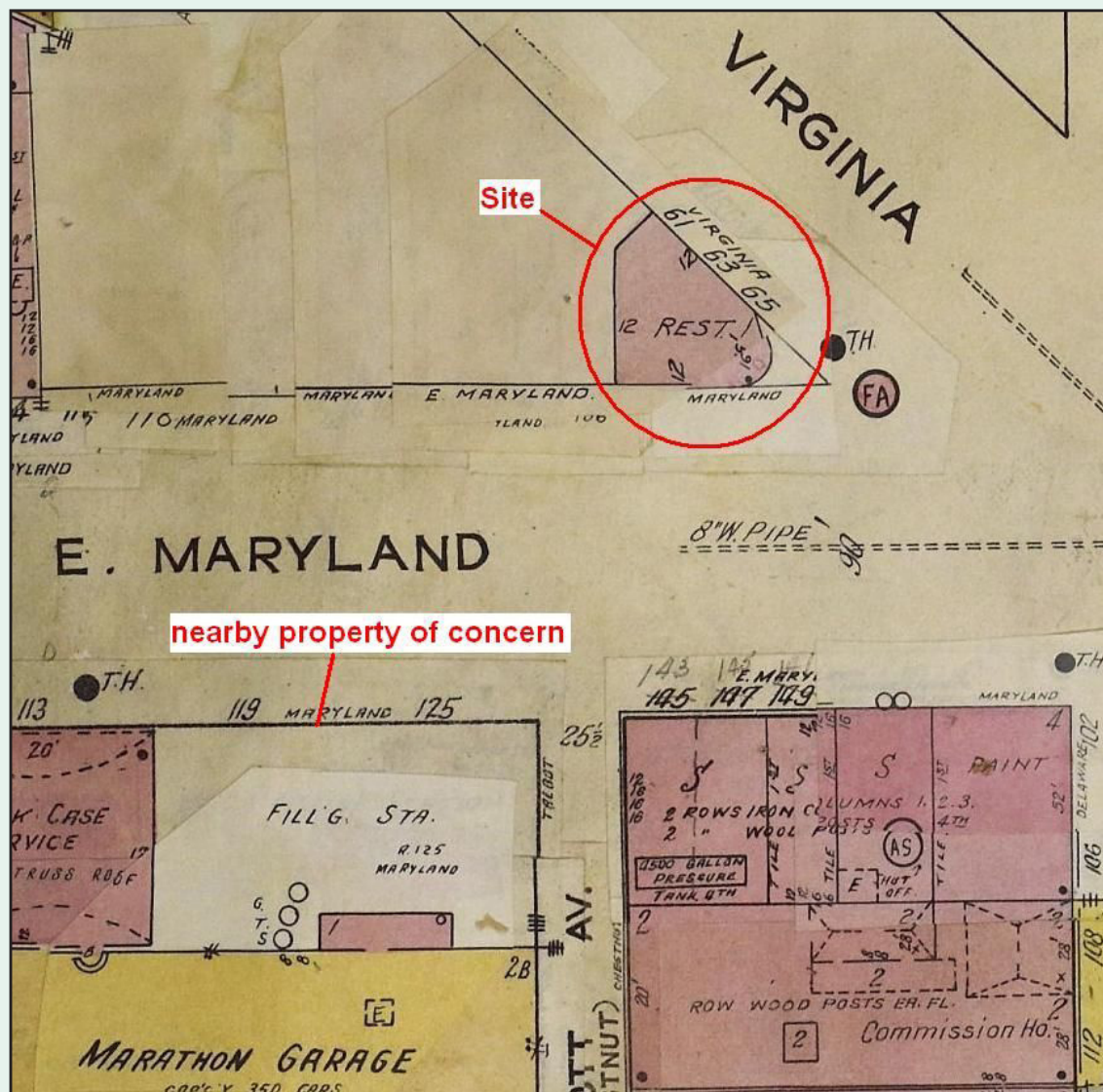


Figure  
3

MARYLAND E 4		
15	CASTLE FILMS AGCY	IM 6588
	LONG J ROBT & ASSOCS	IM 6588
	RAULAND SOUND SYST AGCY	IM 6588
	RODEBECK W H CO	IM 6588
	VICTOR CAMERA & PROJECTORS	
	AGENCY	IM 6588
	WEBSTER CHICAGO RECORDERS	IM 6588
17	SMUCK FLOOP COVERING CO	MA 6324
25	A TYPEWRITER SLS & SV	MA 4711
	BARRON'S OFC SUPPLY CO	MA 4711
	BURTON'S TYPEWRITER SV	CA 0333
	COCKRILL P E	FR 5500
	INDPLS TYPEWRITER CO	FR 5500
	WOODSTOCK TYPEWRTR SLS	FR 5500
27	PARKE DAVIS & CO	MA 3404
28	BARRELED SUNLIGHT PNT	MA 2525
28	BERRY BROS PAINTS DIV OF	
	AMER MARIETTA CO	MA 2525
29	IND WALL PPR & PNT CO	MA 2525
29	U S GUTTA PERCHA PNT CO	MA 2525
29	HATFIELD PAINT CO	MA 4303
37	PRITCHETT JESSE C RECR CO	
	INC BOWLING	LI 0852
112	BUSINESS FURNTR CO	MA 1475
112	DEMORE POSTURE CHAIR AG	MA 1475
112	GENL MDSE CORP	MA 1475
112	OBER CERIL S FURNTR	MA 1475
116	CORDILL II RL EST	MA 8511
116	MILNER BLANCHE BTY SHP	MA 9615
116	SCOTT PRESTON RL EST	MA 8511
121	MARATHON PARKING GAR	MA 7766
121	OHIO OIL CO THE	MA 3312
132	MITCHELL MFG CO	FR 0495
132½	METAL POLISHERS UNION	
	LOCAL 171	FR 6273
143	DILLON CECIL R	FR 3401
143	DILLON OFC EQUIP EXCH	FR 3401
147	IND CASH REGISTER REPR &	
	SUPPLY CO	RI 6665
147	SPRAGUE CASH REG & STORE	
	FIXTURE CO	RI 6665
151	CIRCLE ENGRAVING CO	MA 4334
155	MAAS ALBERT G CO	MA 8315
204	SUPERIOR EMBROIDERY CO	LI 1028

VIRGINIA AVE 4		
3	IND MATL BANK	MA 2331
20	ASSOCIATED ARTS CO	CA 5887
	PHOTOGR	
20	GOHEEN PAT H F & ASSOCS	
	TYPEWRTRS	AT 5011
21	RAILROADMEN'S FEDL SAVINGS	
	& LOAN ASSN	LI 8401
40	WARD'S INDPLS PET SHOP	MA 7994
42	BAR ETT & PATTON BKSLLRS	RI 6896
44	BRODBECK EDGAR E RS EST	FR 2528
44½	COXHEAD RALPH C CORP	FR 7966
44½	VARL TYPER SALES & SERV	
	TYPEWRTRS	FR 7966
47	DAUM HERBERT A LCKSMTH	FR 0817
53	WALSH THOS D TIR	MA 7868
55	PRICE PRINTING CO	MA 8171
59	BOAZ B JR	MA 7794
61	CORKY'S TAVERN	FR 0816
122	BRASS CLEARING HSE CO	MA 7272
122	KARKULA STEPHEN J	MA 7272
128	SHELLY ANNABEL	MA 5275
130	KREM CO THE IMPTRS	FR 0133
130	MUELLER SON & CO GRNDG	
	SVCE	FR 0133
140	HELDMAN ALICE	CA 1491
140	RIEGER JEAN B	CA 0663
140½	COLLENE HAROLD G	FR 0157
144	O'BRIEN'S TAVRN	BR 0080



On the left are two portions of the 1949 Indianapolis city directory for Maryland Avenue and Virginia Avenue, which intersect as seen in the 1954 fire insurance map located above. It is important to note that city directory information identifies prior occupants of properties that are near your site but are addressed on a different street. Therefore, it is important to research the streets around your entire block for the most complete information.

## CITY DIRECTORY PAGES

Some data firms and researchers provide hard copies or digital images of city directory pages. Full-size city directory page images provide the information as it appears in its original format (the city directory book), which eliminates the possibility of human error that could occur when typing or hand writing the information to create a summary or “abstract”. Full-size city directory pages also do not limit the data provided, the way abstracts or a cropped version of pages do. Some people find reviewing city directory pages to be time consuming due to the large amount of addresses, especially for an urban setting. Data providers who highlight your property location on the page will help you save time without limiting the data provided.

## CITY DIRECTORY ABSTRACTS

The quality of city directory abstracts will vary depending on the experience and the procedures used by the researcher. City directory abstracts may be presented in a searchable format making it easy to find key words or phrases such as “filling station” or “dry cleaner.”

Some city directories can be digitized using optical character recognition (OCR) software and then searched for keywords or organized into an abstract. However, the current OCR software available does not always work well, especially on older city directories, due to incompatibility with obsolete or rarely used type fonts.

If you prefer to order city directory abstracts, request that all historical addresses for your property be researched. You shouldn't have to provide addresses for surrounding properties of possible environmental interest you want researched. That just doesn't make sense! How would you know which addresses will be of environmental interest before the city directory research has been performed? To eliminate this issue, request that address ranges on each street be researched, for example “100 – 200 Blossom Boulevard.” This eliminates the problem of minor address changes with the same street name and also provides complete information for surrounding properties.

## A PRIMARY HISTORICAL RESEARCH TOOL

City directory research is a great way to establish a history of occupants and uses of a property and adjoining properties over time. When you have easy-to-use city directory information that is also thorough, it helps you obtain a clearer understanding of potential environmental issues.

