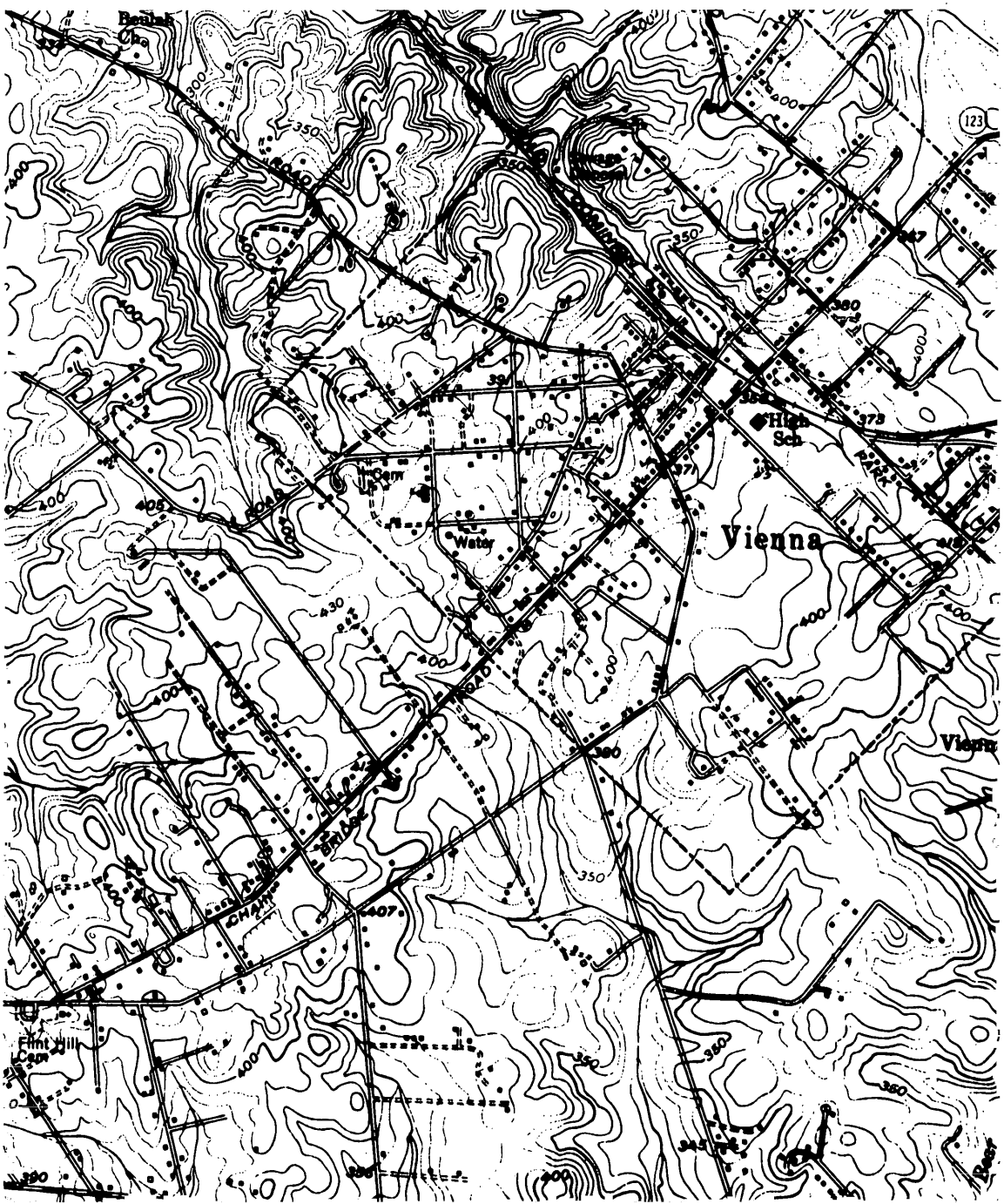


# Using Maps in Genealogy





U.S. Department of the Interior  
U.S. Geological Survey

# Using Maps in Genealogy

*Cover:* 1951. Section of a photocopy of the out-of-print map from the USGS historical files. "Vienna Quadrangle, Virginia-Maryland," 7.5-minute series topographic map, 1:24,000 scale.

*Inside cover:* 1982. Same section of the USGS "Vienna Quadrangle, Virginia-Maryland," 7.5-minute series topographic map, 1:24,000 scale.

## **Maps are only one of many sources you may need to complete a family tree.**

In genealogy, maps are most often used as clues to where public or other records about an ancestor are likely to be found. Searching for maps seldom begins until a newcomer to genealogy has mastered basic genealogical routines.

## **Introductory books on genealogy suggest timesaving ways to plan, gather, organize, and record findings.**

To learn basic genealogical disciplines, it's best to start with the most concise, easy-to-read books, gazetteers, articles, pamphlets, and other sources that apply directly to the kind of research you plan.

Books on the shelves of your local library may not include ones that best serve your purpose. Yet, many local and all major libraries have the latest edition of *Books in Print*. Its subject guide gives the titles, authors, publishers, and prices of hundreds of books on genealogy. The books range from basic guidelines to special aspects of genealogy.

Many libraries also have directories that give the names and addresses of local, State, regional, and national associations of genealogists, historians, and ethnic groups. One or more such groups may be able to help you find ways to deal with special aspects of your research.

Many local libraries also have a copy of the pamphlet *Where to Write for Birth, Death, Divorce, and Marriage Records*. If not, you can purchase a copy from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

## **Before searching for maps, gather as many facts about family history and customs as possible.**

You may then need old and new maps to help track down facts about a branch of your family.

## **How can maps help?**

New and old maps often reveal changing place names, and they may also show changes in the boundaries of nations and their subdivisions. They rarely name individual landowners or residents.

In the United States, birth, death, property, and some other kinds of records are normally kept by county governments. If you can name the place where a kin lived, new or old maps of that place may also show the county seat where useful data about your kin may be obtained.

## **Searches for data about an ancestor are often complicated by changes in the names and boundaries of places.**

*The Geographic Names Information System (GNIS) is the Nation's official data base for place names.* GNIS is maintained by the U.S. Geological Survey and can often provide information on name changes. This data base contains two million entries. They include the names of places that no longer exist as well as other or secondary names for existing places.

This automated system also contains the names of every type of feature except roads and highways. It is especially useful for genealogical research because it contains entries for very small and scattered communities as well as churches and cemeteries, including entries for those that no longer exist.

Complete listings or special searches, for example, for churches in a particular county, are available in high-quality bound listings or on magnetic media. There is a nominal charge for this service.

*The boundaries of many political jurisdictions where early Americans lived have changed one or more times.* Some American families lived in the same locale

for hundreds of years. Yet, the name of the place may have changed over time. Many counties have been subdivided several times, but family records were most often kept where they were originally filed.

This can greatly complicate your work. In one case, for example, the place where a family lived for the entire 19th century was over time part of seven different counties. In such a case, you might have to query all seven courthouses to obtain data needed about members of the family. Copies of records were rarely acquired by a succeeding county.

*Similar, but even more complex problems arise when you must search for personal records in the archives of faraway lands.* The names and boundaries of countries seem to be forever in flux and many public and private record centers disappear or move from place to place.

### **Some places are hard to find.**

Some have changed names one or more times. Some are too small to be shown on a map or noted in a gazetteer. Some areas have been redeveloped. And some are now ghost towns.

Some of these places may be noted on an old map. The location of some others may be found in such sources as lists of abandoned post offices, local histories, government records, microfilm records or clippings from old newspapers, old city directories, or old county atlases kept in the library or archives of a town, city, or county in the region.

If you know the ward, district, neighborhood, or street of a city where an ancestor lived, an old map used in conjunction with a new map of the city may expedite your search for needed facts.

### **Books that show changes in county boundaries can help locate likely sources of records about relatives.**

A librarian near where you live may be able to suggest someone who has access to such sources as *Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790–1920*: Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 1988.

This 445-page book shows all U.S. county boundaries from 1790 to 1920. On each of nearly 400 maps, old county lines are superimposed over modern ones to highlight boundary changes at 10-year intervals.

### **Separate books or papers have been published about the “genealogy” of each of a large number of States, counties, and other areas.**

For example:

*Abstracts of the Earliest Wills Upon Record in the County of Suffolk, Massachusetts*: Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 1984.

*Surnames in Ireland, Special Report On [together with] Varieties and Synonymes of Surnames and Christian Names in Ireland*: Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 2 vols., indexed, 1901, 1909 (reprinted 1988).

Some old and new postal directories and some other sources name the county seat of each place listed.

### **To find useful maps, you must have strong clues as to where and when your ancestors lived.**

It will be worthwhile to gain access to modern and old maps of each ancestral site. You should try to find an old map that shows an area as it was close to the time your ancestor lived there.

The best maps for your purpose are ones that—

- show in great detail an area around the place where your relative lived
- show its location within a county or other jurisdiction
- name and show the borders of neighboring areas.

A plat book in a town hall or county courthouse or an old fire insurance map may show an outline of your ancestor's house and its placement on your ancestor's property.

Such maps should help to picture where relatives were born, resided, attended school, worked, shopped, voted, traveled over land or water, courted, married, raised families, and were laid to rest. You may need later maps of the same or other places to track down ensuing generations.

Maps usually suggest some patterns of settlement and movement, but rule out others. For example, topographic and other relief maps may show hills or mountains that impeded migration or access to certain areas. Rivers bridged now may not have been bridged when kin lived nearby. Yet, a river can aid migratory travel, sometimes because it is easier to travel on water than through dense forests and undergrowth, and it is even possible that your ancestors traveled by waterway to market, to attend church or school, or to pursue a host of other interests. Yet, crossing a river could be difficult for a person not prepared for such a venture.

Maps covering larger areas may suggest various kinds of trade, employment, social, recreational, or other interactions among the peoples of neighboring towns, settlements, or other locales. Analysis of such maps may lead to expanding the scope of research beyond nearby county, State, provincial, or national boundaries.

**A local library is a good place to begin your search for maps, atlases, gazetteers, local directories, and other sources that pertain to locales of interest.**

Most public libraries have encyclopedias; atlases; some books on genealogy; lists of books in print; and directories of local, State, national, and international organizations that can be helpful to genealogists.

Many kinds of local maps of towns, counties, and States may be found at local, State, or regional libraries, museums, or historical archives.

Local libraries or historical groups may be the only places where you can find some old city and business directories; old city, county, and regional atlases; and files of obituaries and other articles from microfilm copies of local newspapers.

Most local librarians can help you gain access to the rich holdings of the U.S. Geological Survey, National Archives, Library of Congress, and international sources of maps and other resources needed by genealogists.

A local librarian may also be able to refer you to sources that can help you learn the present name of a foreign place where records about an ancestor might be found.

The reference sections of many libraries also have these useful directories:

*Directory of Historical Societies of the United States and Canada*: American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, TN, 1990. This directory lists about 1,000 sources in a genealogy index.

*Official Museum Directory [American Association of Museums]*: National Register Publishing Company, Wilmette, IL, 1989.

## Some historical atlases

*A Genealogical and Historical Atlas of the United States of America*: Everton Publishers, Logan, UT, 1976.

*Atlas of American History*: Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1943, 294 p.

*Historical Atlas and Chronology of County Boundaries, 1788–1980*: G.K. Hall, Boston, 1984, 5 vols.

*Historical U.S. County Outline Map Collection, 1840–1980*: Department of Geography, University of Maryland Baltimore County, Baltimore, 1984.

*Township Atlas of the United States*: Androit Associates, McLean, VA, 1979.

*A Series of County Outline Maps of the Southeastern United States for the Period 1790–1980*: Department of Geography, University of North Carolina, 1973.

## Selected place-name sources

Specific inquiries by mail or phone:

The USGS GNIS will respond to written and phone inquiries about present, past, and secondary names and locations of any of more than two million place and geographic feature names, large and small, in the United States. GNIS lists the names and locations of churches and cemeteries, including many that no longer exist. To use this free service, write to the U.S. Geological Survey, Branch of Geographic Names, 523 National Center, Reston, VA 22092 or telephone 703-648-4544.

General:

*Chambers World Gazetteer: A–Z of Geographical Information*: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

*Columbia Lipincott Gazetteer of the World*: Columbia University Press and J.B. Lippincott, 1962.

*Gazetteers and Glossaries of Geographical Names of the Member Countries of the United Nations and the Agencies in Relationship with the United Nations: Bibliography, 1946–1976*: Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1984.

*Geographic Names and the Federal Government: A Bibliography*: Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress, 1990.

*Names on the Globe*: Oxford University Press, New York, 1975.

*Names on the Land: A Historical Account of Place-Naming*: Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1967, 3d ed.

*Webster's New Geographical Dictionary*: G. & C. Merriam, Springfield, MA, 1988.

States of the United States:  
(small sample of available publications):

*A Gazetteer of Maryland and Delaware* [1904] (reprint): Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, 1976.

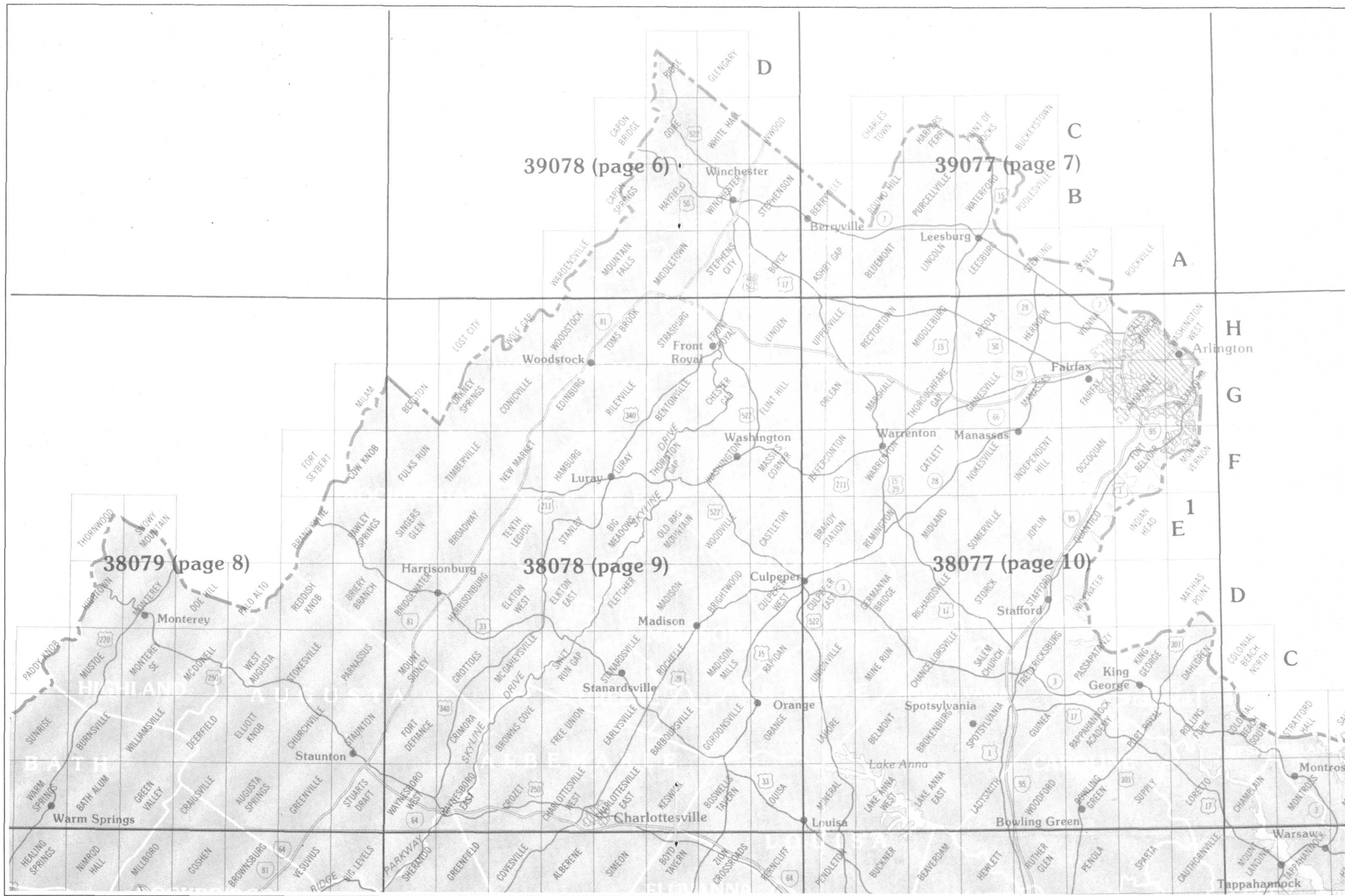
*A Gazetteer of Virginia and West Virginia* [1904] (reprint): Genealogical Publishing Co., Baltimore, 1975.

*A List of Places Included in 19th Century Virginia Directories*: Virginia State Library, Richmond, 1960.

*The Placenames of Maryland. Their Origin and Meaning*: Maryland Historical Society, 1984.

United States:

*Bibliography of Place-Name Literature, United States and Canada*: American Library Association, Chicago, 1982, 3d ed.



Section of "7.5-Minute Quadrangle Names," insert from the USGS index for Virginia. This helpful guide includes county seats (indicated by black dots) and the index page on which you will find lists of available

maps covering your area of interest. The county seat for the Vienna quadrangle, shown on the cover, is Fairfax. Information on how to obtain USGS State indexes is on page 9.



*National Gazetteer of the United States of America*, Concise 1990, U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 1200-US: U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1990.

#### International:

*Parish Maps of the Counties of England and Wales*, Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies, Logan, Utah: Everton, 1977.

*Shtetl Finder: Jewish Communities in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries in the Pale of Settlement of Russia and Poland, and in Lithuania, Latvia, Galicia, and Bukovina, with Names of Residents*: Heritage Books, Bowie, MD, 1989.

#### Some directories of map collections

Many libraries have the current edition of *The Map Catalog*: Vantage Press, a division of Random House, New York, 1990. This handbook describes features and sources of a worldwide range of new and old maps, atlases, and related products. Has sections on researching old maps, history maps, maps of the United States and of foreign countries, State and provincial maps, county maps, urban maps and city plans, boundary maps, census maps, railroad maps, topographic maps, and many other kinds of maps.

*World Mapping Today*: Butterworths, London, 1987. A large, 583-page book that describes the mapping programs of each country in the world and gives the names and addresses of each country's principal mapping agencies. Section 4 on Map Evaluation provides information on how to interpret and use maps.

*Map Collections in the United States and Canada: A Directory*: Special Libraries Association, New York, 1984, 4th ed.

*Guide to U.S. Map Resources, 2nd Edition*: American Library Association, Chicago, 1990.

*Directory of Canadian Map Collections/ Répertoire des collections de cartes canadiennes*: Association of Canadian Map Libraries, 1980, 4th ed.

*World Directory of Map Collections* compiled by the Section of Geography and Map Libraries, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions: K.G. Saur, Munich, 1986.

#### Some map bibliographies

*Historical Geography of the United States: A Guide to Information Sources*: Gale Research, Detroit, 1982 (see especially p. 3–51).

*Checklist of Printed Maps of the Middle West to 1900*: G.K. Hall, Boston, 1981–82, 14 vols.

*Bibliography of Cartography*, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress: G.K. Hall, Boston, 1973, 5 vols. *First Supplement*, 1980, 2 vols.

#### U.S. Geological Survey Maps

In 1879, the Geological Survey's new library began to accumulate its holdings of topographic and many other kinds of maps of the United States and its territories.

*Copies of maps from the Survey's library can be ordered as photo blowups from roll microfilm of out-of-print maps of the United States, its territories, and outlying areas. Scales of copies are not exact.*

To order a photocopy of a map in the Survey's library, describe the kind of map you are seeking as completely as you can, contact any Earth Science Information Center, or call 1-800-USA-MAPS.

*You can order current USGS maps directly from the Survey or from a local map dealer.*

The Geological Survey publishes and updates—

- More than 53,000 large-scale topographic maps (1:24,000, 1:25,000, and 1:20,000 for Puerto Rico) together show most local areas of the United States and its territories, with the exception of Alaska's 2,400 maps at 1:63,360. Each map names and shows in fairly rich detail every settled area and other features within the map's boundaries.

- Topographic maps of selected counties at scales of 1:50,000 or 1:100,000.

You can purchase these and other USGS maps from the USGS or a local map dealer.

For each State, the USGS publishes an *Index to Topographic and Other Map Coverage and [State] Catalog of Topographic and other Published Maps [all scales]*. To obtain a free index and catalog for one or more States, contact any Earth Science Information Center, or call 1-800-USA-MAPS.

## **Geography and Map Division Library of Congress**

This division holds and has direct access to almost 4 million maps, 51,000 atlases, 8,000 reference works, and a large number of related materials in other formats.

The division draws on these vast resources to provide cartographic and geographic information to Congress, Federal and local governments, the scholarly community, and the public.

No single catalog includes the division's total holdings, but card and book catalogs provide access to its collections.

The atlas collection includes representative volumes of all significant publishers of atlases over the past five centuries. The atlases cover individual continents, countries, States, counties, cities, and other geographic regions, as well as the world. They range in scope from general to topical.

Of major interest to genealogists are land ownership records kept by Federal, State, county, and local government agencies. A good source for early county maps is *Land Ownership Maps: A Checklist of Nineteenth Century United States County Maps in the Library of Congress*, 1967.

Old and new large- and small-scale planimetric, topographic, and other kinds of maps are available for every part of the United States and for most other areas of the world.

Among the many county maps and city and town plans are some 700,000 large-scale Sanborn fire insurance maps. Since 1867, the firm has issued and periodically updated detailed plans of 12,000 U.S. cities and towns. Some areas are represented by as many as eight different editions. This collection is an unrivaled cartographic and historic record of America's urban settlement and growth over more than a century.

### *Reference services*

Reference service is available to the public in the Geography and Map Reading Room and by telephone or correspondence.

The collections are for reference use only. Maps and atlases are not available for sale or free distribution.

The Geography and Map Division will respond to requests that cannot be answered by a library or other source in your locality. In many cases, the division can tell you the present name of a place where you believe

an ancestor once lived, and sometimes it can suggest places where vital and other records about your ancestor may be on file. It is not possible, however, for the division to undertake extensive research projects or to assist students in preparing term papers, bibliographies, or other academic assignments.

### *Geography and Map Reading Room*

This large reading room is open to the public Monday–Friday (8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.) and Saturday (8:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.). It is in Room LM B01 of the library's James Madison Memorial Building, 101 Independence Avenue, SE., Washington, DC.

In the reading room, geographic and cartographic bibliographies, reference books, gazetteers, and current issues of cartographic and geographic journals are readily available for consultation. You can draw upon the resources of the library in the reading room, but loans to the public are not authorized.

### *Photocopies of maps and plates*

Subject to copyright or other restrictions, photocopies of maps and plates from atlases may be ordered through the library's Photoduplication Service.

### *Two free brochures*

- (1) *Geography and Map Division, the Library of Congress*
- (2) *List of Publications, Geography and Map Division*

Look for them in your library or order copies from:

Geography and Map Division  
Library of Congress  
Washington, DC 20540

Another helpful Library of Congress publication is *The Geography and Map Division: A Guide to Its Collections and Services*. This booklet describes some noteworthy items in the library's collection. You can order it (specify stock number 030-004-00015-9) from:

Superintendent of Documents  
U.S. Government Printing Office  
Washington, DC 20402

### **Cartographic and Architectural Branch, National Archives**

The National Archives is the official repository for noncurrent, permanently valuable records produced by the Federal Government since 1774, including almost 2 million maps.

### *Cartographic records in the National Archives*

If your library does not have a copy of the free pamphlet *Cartographic and Architectural Branch*, you can order it (specify General Information Leaflet #26) from:

Publications Sales Branch  
National Archives  
8th and Pennsylvania Ave., NW.  
Washington, DC 20408

*Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives*. This 304-page illustrated guide was revised in 1985. Chapter 20 on Cartographic Records describes holdings of the National Archives that are of special value to genealogists—

- Census Records: census enumeration maps, enumeration district descriptions, and civil division outline maps.
- General Land Office Records: township survey plats, and U.S. land district maps.

- **Military Records:** manuscript, annotated, and printed maps, plans, and charts compiled or collected by various military organizations.

- **Other Cartographic Records:** small-scale civil division maps, postal route maps, Geological Survey topographic quadrangle maps, area and county soil maps, tax assessment maps, maps relating to captured and abandoned property, and maps pertaining to American Indians.

This guide can be ordered from the Publications Sales Branch of the National Archives, or from the National Archives Trust Fund, NEPS Dept. 735, P.O. Box 100793, Atlanta, GA 30384 (hard cover \$35, softcover \$25, plus \$3 postage).

*The Archives, A Guide to the National Archives Field Branches*, Szucs and Luebking, 1988. This guide describes the holdings of the National Archives Field Branches located in 11 principal cities in the United States. The field branches hold in microfilm format national and regional records of interest to genealogists.

The guide can be ordered from Ancestry Publishing, P.O. Box 476, Salt Lake City, UT 84110.

*Other National Archives publications about cartographic records*

*Civil War Maps*, 1964.

*List of Selected Maps of States and Territories*, 1971.

*Records and Policies of the Post Office Department Relating to Place Names*, 1975.

*Cartographic Records Relating to American Indians*, 1974...*the Bureau of Indian Affairs*, 1977...*the Territory of Iowa 1836–1848*, 1971...*the Territory of Wisconsin, 1836–1846*, 1970.

*List of Cartographic Records of the General Land Office*, 1964.

*Pre-Federal Maps in the National Archives: An Annotated List*, 1975.

*Transportation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Survey of the Cartographic Records in the National Archives of the United States*, 1975.

*Preliminary Inventory of the Cartographic Records of the Bureau of the Census*, 1958.

## Followup hints

Directories and pamphlets are only general guides, but they will help direct you to the right map collection to suit your needs.

In making inquiries, give as much information as possible—including the geographic coordinates of the area.

Give the State, county, and town or township; the publisher, year and place of publication; and the edition of the map or volume of maps, if possible.

Specify the kind of information that you want on the map and the approximate area of coverage.

The map researcher then will be able to indicate if that particular map—or one like it—exists in that particular collection.

Once you have decided which source to investigate more fully, you are ready to begin inquiries.

*Acknowledgments:*

The U.S. Geological Survey would like to thank the following for their assistance:

J.B. Post, "Maps for Genealogists," *Special Libraries Association G&M Bulletin*, No. 143, March 1986, New York.

Ronald E. Grim, Reference and Bibliography Section, Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Genealogical Publishing Company, 1001 N. Calvert Street, Baltimore, MD 21202.

Riley Moffat, "Genealogy and Maps: Some Reference Resources," *Western Association of Map Libraries Information Bulletin*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Nov. 1980, Santa Barbara, Calif.

