

Mapping Ancestors on the Move

Melanie McComb, Senior Genealogist, melanie.mccomb@americanancestors.org

Why Use Maps in Genealogy?

- Piece together your family puzzle
- Visualize the land on which they lived
- Provide context for their surroundings
- Follow family groups through the years
- Travel and migration routes
- Use maps to present information
- Think broadly: shift your focus away from an individual to a *place* to break down brick walls and provide context

Types of Maps

- Different types of maps may be available depending on whether your research subject is urban or rural, and the time period.
- Cadastral maps (land/property ownership)
- Topographical maps (geographic features)
- Insurance (Sanborn)/real estate maps
- Ward and enumeration district maps
- Land surveys or plat maps
- Road maps
- Consider the purpose of the map – why was it created, who created it?

Cadastral Maps

- Otherwise known as land ownership maps or plat maps
- Shows the amount of land and owner's name
- Maps are used for taxation purposes, land ownership claims, mortgage planning, urban planning, and more

Fire Insurance Maps

- Originated in London, England towards the end of the eighteenth century
- Used by insurance companies to assess potential risk of a building based on several factors:
- Building Material
- Proximity to other buildings
- Proximity to gas lines

Enumeration District Maps

- An enumeration district was an area that a census taker could cover in two weeks in cities and four weeks in rural areas.
- The U.S Census Bureau started using enumeration districts in 1880.
- The maps illustrate the district's boundaries
- They provide a visual representation on how enumerators travelled from house to house.
- They include landmarks like schools, churches, parks, etc.

Warrantee Township Maps

- Show original land purchases from proprietors of a colony or commonwealth
- Show the following information:
 - Name of warrantee
 - Name of patentee
 - Number of acres
 - Name of tract
 - Dates of warrant, survey, and patent
 - Survey and patent #'s

Military Maps

- Helpful to understand battles that your ancestors fought in and follow a regiment
- Some maps show property owners

Mapping a Migration Route

1. Summarize What You Know
2. Create a Research Plan
3. Research
4. Create a Timeline
5. Create a Map

Creating Your Own Map

- On the computer or by hand
- Google Maps
- Google Earth
- ArcGIS
- StoryMaps
- DeedMapper
- Print-outs of (blank) maps

Publications

Crowley, John, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy. *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*. (New York: New York University Press, 2012)

Devine, Donn. *Using Maps in Family History Research*. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry Inc., 1998)

Dolan, Allison. *The Family Tree Historical Maps Book: A State-by-State Atlas of U.S. History, 1790-1900* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Family Tree Books, 2014)

Dolan, Allison. *The Family Tree Historical Maps Book, Europe: A Country-by-Country Atlas of European History, 1700s-1900s* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Family Tree Books, 2015)

Dollarhide, William. *American Migration Routes: Part I, Indian Paths, Post Roads & Wagon Roads (Part I)*. (Otting, Washington: Family Roots Publishing, 2022)

Dollarhide, William. *American Migration Routes: Part 2, Stagecoach, Steamboat, Canal & Early Railroad Routes*. (Otting, Washington: Family Roots Publishing, 2022)

Dollarhide, William. *Map Guide to American Migration Routes, 1735-1815*. (Bountiful, Utah: Heritage Quest, 2000)

Knowles, Anne Kelly. *Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS are Changing Historical Scholarship*. (Redlands, California: ESRI Press, 2008)

Masters, Charles. *Essential Maps for Family Historians*. (Newbury, Berkshire, England: Countryside Books, 2009)

Oswald, Diane L. *Fire Insurance Maps: Their History and Applications*. (College Station, Texas: Lacewing Press, 1997)

Wilson, Donald A. *Interpreting land records*. (Hoboken, Wiley, 2006)

Web Sites

- American Ancestors – www.americanancestors.org
- American Ancestors Partner Databases (at home) www.americanancestors.org/Search/External-Databases
- Ancestry www.ancestry.com
- ArcGIS www.arcgis.com/index.html
- ArchiveGrid <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>
- Bureau of Land Management <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx>
- David Rumsey Map Collection <https://davidrumsey.com>
- DeedMapper <https://directlinesoftware.com/WordPress/index.php/deedmapper-4-2/>
- FamilySearch www.familysearch.org
- Fold3 www.fold3.com
- Google Earth <https://earth.google.com/web>
- Google Maps <https://www.google.com/maps>
- Island Imagined (Historic Maps of Prince Edward Island) www.islandimagined.ca
- Massachusetts Historical Society www.masshist.org/collections/maps
- National Archives www.archives.gov
- New York Public Library Digital Collections <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org>
- Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center <https://collections.leventhalmap.org>
- North Carolina Maps <https://web.lib.unc.edu/nc-maps/>
- Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission www.phmc.pa.gov
- Printable World Map www.printableworldmap.net
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps at Library of Congress www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/sanborn
- StoryMaps <https://storymaps.com>