



# The Genealogy Superpowers of an Address

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An address – the location of an ancestral home, a family business or a house of worship – is a fairly common fact used by genealogists. But have you really considered the elements of an address, the best places to locate address information, and the power that an address has to get family and friends interested in your family's history?

## The Anatomy of An Address

Addresses were not common until the modern postal system was developed in each country; until then there was really no need to number houses. Streets were most likely named after landmarks, after a famous resident or reflecting the professions of the residents.

In the United States, as in most English-speaking countries, houses are numbered in an alternating scheme with odd numbers on the western or southern side and even numbers on the eastern or northern side. In the UK and Ireland, an address may also reflect a "house name" instead of a house number.

In more modern times, even rural locations have been assigned a number due to the use of 911 and emergency response systems.

## Where to Find Address Information

Many of the basic records used by genealogists contain address data:

- **Federal and state census records.** The 1900 US Federal Census was the first to list a street name and address. Many state censuses did not list address information. When an address is not included, use the enumeration district or ward number to help narrow down locations.
- **Vital records.** Depending upon the type of record and the time period, you may find address information on birth, death and marriage certificates. In addition, addresses for hospitals, funeral homes and physicians may also be listed.
- **City and business directories.** As early as the 1820s, cities and towns compiled published directories of residents and businesses.
- **Church and synagogue records.** Membership records, sacramental registers and other records may list the address of a member or congregant.
- **Fraternal society records.** Year books as well as newsletters often listed address information. In addition, some groups listed address changes for members.



- **Passenger Lists.** Make sure you look at the “second” or “facing” page of a passenger list where the sponsor’s name and address are listed. This is usually where your immigrant ancestor was living once they arrived.
- **Newspapers.** It was common for a person’s address to be listed, especially with obituaries and death notices (the funeral often started at the decedent’s home).
- **Property records.** Land records, deed records and the like all have address information.
- **Military records.** Draft and registration cards list the address for the person registering. Pension records will also list the address of record for a pension recipient.

## Research Strategies Using Addresses

Whether looking for an address or using an address to expand your search, here are some strategies that have proven effective for other genealogists:

- **Use name and number variations.** Just like given names and surnames, try variations on street names. In addition, look at the neighbors using house numbers near the ancestor’s location. This type of cluster research can yield valuable clues.
- **Street grids change over time.** An address you locate in a record dated 1888 may not be the same as the present day address. This is true of Chicago, which re-aligned its grid in 1909 as well as other cities. Research the history of street name changes before you confirm that address!
- **Check census enumeration district maps.** Especially if you can find a family in one census but not the previous or subsequent census, check to make sure you have the correct enumeration district. The boundaries for each enumeration district changed as the population of a town or city grew or declined.
- **Plot and track place of employment and house of worship.** Using a mapping program such as Google Maps, pin locations where your ancestors were employed and where they attended church or synagogue relative to where they lived. A visual depiction of cluster research data can help your research.
- **Check current or recent real estate listings.** Use sites like Trulia or Zillow and plug in the street address of an ancestor. You can find information such as when the house was built, the lot size, etc. In addition, if the home is for sale or was recently for sale, you may find photos of the exterior and interior of the home.
- **Set up alerts using an address.** Some researchers have found luck by creating alerts using specific addresses so they can be notified when there is an Internet posting about the address. Consider using Google Alerts and ancestor addresses; you could find out when a property is up for sale or when there is a historical mention of that address.



## Sharing Your Family History Using Addresses

Besides recording an address in your genealogy database, there are several ways in which you can use that address in different family history-related projects.

- **Create a house history.** Trace the past residents of your current home or an ancestral home using census, property records as well as newspaper articles.
- **View cluster research data.** Use a mapping program such as Google Maps, pin locations where your ancestors lived and worked; determine the location relative to their residence. Cluster research data can help your research.
- **Plot migration patterns.** **RootsMapper** is a free mapping program that works with your FamilySearch login and family tree to plot migration patterns between generations. Using address information (city, state/province) added to various fields, the map can depict movement between locations and generations.

## Resource List

- **12 Ways To Find Your Ancestor's Address**  
<http://www.theancestorhunt.com/blog/12-ways-to-find-your-ancestors-address>
- **A Look at Cook** (Example of street name changes in Chicago)  
<http://www.alookatcook.com>
- **Cyndi's List: Directories**  
<http://www.cyndislist.com/directories/>
- **Direct Me NYC 1940**  
<http://directme.nypl.org/>
- **Google Alerts**  
<http://alerts.google.com>
- **Google Maps**  
<http://maps.google.com>
- **How to Trace the History and Genealogy of Your Home**  
<https://www.thoughtco.com/house-history-research-1421676>
- **Obtaining Street Name Changes in One Step**  
[http://stevemorse.org/census/change\\_s.html](http://stevemorse.org/census/change_s.html)
- **RootsMapper**  
<https://rootsmapper.com>
- **Trulia**  
<http://www.trulia.com>
- **Unified Census ED Finder**  
<http://stevemorse.org/census/unified.html>
- **Zillow**  
<http://www.zillow.com>