

## **City Directory Searches**

### **What is a City Directory?**

- R.L. Polk & Co Directories
- Similar to a phone book (before there were phones)
- Alphabetical listings of inhabitants of a given city for a given year
- Some also include a “reverse” street directory
  - Bellingham has this feature beginning in 1931

### **Why Search City Directories?**

- A good place to start getting some names and dates of residents at an address
- Can use to start other research, such as deed searches, census searches etc.
- We’re looking for:
  - Long-term residents
  - Early residents
  - Potentially interesting residents
- To help tell the story of a house or neighborhood

### **Where Do I Find City Directories?**

Available at:

- Bellingham Public Library (most complete collection)
- Whatcom Museum Photo Archives
- State Archives/CPNWS
- Western Washington University Library
- 1890s online at:  
<http://theusgenweb.org/wa/whatcom/directories.htm>
- 1905 and 1915 online at: <http://www.hp-nw.com/bellingham.htm>

### **Things to Consider**

- Town and Street Name changes
- Directories from different years might be organized a little differently
- Abbreviations – usually explained in an index near the front
- You may find spelling and transcription mistakes

## **Pre-1904 Directories – Town Names**

- Lettered Streets: Whatcom/New Whatcom
- York Neighborhood: Sehome/New Whatcom
- South Hill: Sehome/Bellingham/Fairhaven

## **Some Historic Bellingham Neighborhood Street-name Changes**

### **York Neighborhood Streets pre-1901**

- Ellis was Harrison
- Franklin was Government
- Grant was Meikle
- Iron was Hill
- James was Nelson
- King was James
- York was Virginia

### **Lettered Streets pre-1903**

- Holly was 13th
- Astor was 14th
- Bancroft was 15th
- Clinton was 16th
- Dupont was 17th
- Ellsworth was 18th
- Farragut was 19th
- Girard was 20th
- Halleck was 21st
- Irving was 22nd
- Jenkins was 23rd
- Kearney was 24th
- Logan was 25th
- Morris was 26th
- Nicklin was 27th

## How to Search City Directories

### 1. Look up by address

- Start with a given address
- First, do a “reverse” directory search using a 1931 directory
  - Pink or yellow section in middle
  - Organized alphabetically by street name
- Find the street name, find the address number
- Write down the associated surname

### 2. Look-up by surname

- To find more information – occupation, spouse etc.
- Record as written

### 3. Begin Searching Backwards with a Surname

- Once you find a surname through a reverse directory, you can work backwards through time
- Either you will reach the construction date, or find they are listed at a different address
- Record in about five year increments

### 4. Use Online Searchable Directories

- 1905 and 1915 are available in searchable pdf format online at:  
<http://www.hp-nw.com/bellingham.htm>
  - Can search by address or surname
  - Open the file, click on “search” with the binocular icon next to it
  - Type in terms to search by - such as “925 13th”
  - The entire document is searched and all matches displayed
  - Note some street names are abbreviated, such as B’way = Broadway
  - Gives you a new surname to begin searching again by
- 1890s available online at  
<http://theusgenweb.org/wa/whatcom/directories.htm>
  - Searchable, but no house numbers, only street names and surnames
  - Search by using your browser’s “find” feature\*

## 5. Move forward in time

- In five year increments
- From 1931 through about 1960
- By reverse directory lookups
- Recording as above on sheets provided

## Filling Out City Directory Sheets

- Use a pencil
- Write neatly
- Include your name and date
- Start in middle with 1931
- Record last name first

\* Using your browser's "find" feature:

**PC users:** Press the Control key + F, type a word, and then press "Find Next," or alternately by clicking "Edit" on the toolbar and clicking "Find"

**Mac users:** Press the Apple key + F, type a word, and then press the Enter key.