

USE OF ATLASES, GAZETTEERS, AND MAPS AS GENEALOGY AIDS

By

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Genealogy is the study of family history and it has become the third most popular hobby in the country behind stamp collecting and coin collecting. Tracing one's ancestors through the generations requires a knowledge of history and maps to follow the family's mobility and change of habitat. This article will discuss some of the map sources and references which will help a genealogist in his research and special emphasis will be give to map sources pertaining to Arlington County, Virginia.

We are fortunate to have two great map collections available for research purposes in the vicinity of Arlington County. These are the Cartographic Archives at the National Archives containing over 1,500,000 maps,¹ and the Cartographic Collections at the Library of Congress consisting of over 3,500,000 maps and 44,000 atlases.²

There are four types of general questions for which the genealogist or local historian will find maps as useful sources: 1) location of place names, 2) determining political administrative divisions, 3) determining boundary changes, and 4) to locate places in urban communities.³

Place Names

Perhaps the most common question a genealogist will have is: "Where is this place?". A place name will be found in a will, deed, letter, family diary or Bible. With a known place name, the search should begin with gazetteers. Most atlases include a gazetteer or index of place names up to and including the 345,000 entry *Times Index-Gazetteer of the World*.⁴ For the United States, the most detailed list of place names is in the *Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide*,⁵ an annual publication which lists about 200,000 places. Comprehensive American gazetteers listing cities, towns, villages, post offices, counties, and townships with descriptions appeared regularly from 1795 to 1884,⁶ and individual state gazetteers have been produced off and on since 1806. The authoritative index to these gazetteers is Sealock and Seely's *Bibliography of Place Name Literature*.⁷ Not included in Sealock and Seely are the R.L. Polk directories which appeared from about the 1880's to the 1920's. They are essentially gazetteers in that they list each populated place in the state with descriptions of the places and lists of subscribers. There are several sources where Virginia place names can be researched.⁸ The United States Geological Survey is in process of preparing place name lists for each of the 50 states based upon all the names found on the U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps. It will be published as *USGS Professional Paper 1200*.

There are many state, county, and city atlases which are useful sources for place names. A union list was prepared by Clare E. LeGear with the cooperation of over 200 libraries in the United States.⁹ Since this checklist was prepared over thirty years ago, a search of the atlas shelflist at the Library of Congress will indicate if additional items have been added to the collections. Many of the old county and state atlases and maps are being reprinted by local historical societies. The Bookmark (P.O. Box 74, Knightstown, Indiana 46148), Unigraphic, Inc. (1401 North Fares Avenue, Evansville, Indiana 47711) and Historic Urban Plans (Box 276, Ithaca, New York 14850), are commercial publishers who specialize in this type of product. Atlases of reprinted state maps have been compiled and published by E. Kay Kirkham¹⁰ and Richard H. Jackson.¹¹

If the place name cannot be located through gazetteers and atlases, one can use individual sheet maps of large scale coverage for research. Some local place names often include family names and these may verify the existence of an early resident by that name at a particular site.

A good world atlas can be a useful reference in your search for a particular place name. The Bartholomew *Times Atlas*¹² and the National Geographical Society's *Atlas of the World*¹³ are two of the better atlases for this purpose. *The Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World*¹⁴ is a good source to obtain more detail on a particular entry. Locating a place name in a foreign country is done much the same as for the United States. It is desirable to find a source contemporary with the particular place. The United States Board on Geographic Names gazetteers are useful sources to start your search. They will include geographical coordinates which can be used to locate the place name on a map. After locating the place name, a genealogist will probably want to know the political jurisdiction at a specific period in time so that the appropriate records can be searched.

Minor Civil Divisions

Related to locating place names of specific places is the question of finding a township or minor civil division. Counties are divided into minor civil divisions. In the Northeast and Midwest, these minor civil divisions are called townships and are given proper names. In New England, they are called towns and have remained important locally. In states where land was surveyed and sold by the General Land Office, the townships were six miles square. These rectangular townships north of the Ohio River and west of the Mississippi River were given proper names. Years ago people often gave their addresses in terms of these townships in their correspondence and legal documents. These townships are not commonly shown on modern maps so an earlier or historical map may have to be used.

The Bureau of the Census still uses minor civil divisions for census taking purposes and prints state maps showing their jurisdiction.¹⁵ Androit Associates¹⁶ has compiled a detailed index of townships which is a useful reference aid.

If the genealogist intends to locate someone on the microfilm census rolls, then identifying the minor civil division or township becomes very important. Since the names are listed under the states by counties, then by minor civil divisions or incorporated places. Identifying the township means the patron can eliminate having to look through all the other townships in the county.

Boundary Changes

Another common problem related to the early days of the various states and territories is boundary changes. As the states were settled, new counties and minor civil divisions were organized, either out of unorganized territory or from divisions of previously organized units. Keeping track of these boundary changes is difficult. Tracing the genealogy of a county can best be done in Kane's *The American Counties*.¹⁷ Birdsall and Florin¹⁸ published a series of county outline maps for the southeastern United States which is a good reference aid. The Library of Congress has recently published a list of facsimile maps and atlases¹⁹ which can be useful for this purpose too. Charles F. Cocke was the author of three publications on parish boundaries in Virginia,²⁰ which will aid Virginia researchers.

Urban Places

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the United States was predominantly a rural society, however cities were beginning to develop into places where increasing numbers of inhabitants sought employment during the industrial age. Locating people in urban areas requires some different techniques. As towns were incorporated and reached over 5,000 inhabitants, an urban area would be subdivided into wards for census and administrative purposes. A genealogist will find the search for an ancestor easier when using the census rolls if the ward of residence is known. Many county atlases produced during the period of 1860-1920 would show the ward boundaries in towns and cities. E. Kay Kirkham²¹ has reproduced many of these city ward maps of the period and compiled an index to streets by wards. This makes it easier to locate a person's residence or business if the street address is known. Michael H. Shelley²² compiled a selective checklist of early ward maps in the Library of Congress.

Fire insurance maps by the Sanborn Map Company are useful sources for locating ancestral residences and business places. There are two volumes showing the types of construction for buildings in Arlington County for the period of 1936.²³

Land Ownership

Genealogists will find land ownership maps and atlases another interesting source to search. Richard Stephenson²⁴ compiled a good checklist of these county maps in 1967. Donald A. Wise²⁵ prepared a Land Ownership Map of Arlington County, Virginia based on the original Colonial land plats

for the period 1669-1796. Another useful map for land ownership is the Howell and Taylor²⁶ Map of Alexandria County, Virginia, 1900. During the Civil War, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prepared some detailed maps of the Environs of Washington.²⁷ Sheets 4, 7 and 8 cover the Falls Church area, Bailey's Crossroads, and Four Mile Run-Potomac area. Landowners are shown as of that time. The Franklin Survey Company²⁸ prepared land ownership maps of Arlington County in 1935, 1943, and 1952. These also show land ownership data for the respective time periods.

In conclusion, genealogists and local historians are interested in going beyond just locating an ancestor. They are usually compiling a family history and will want to use maps to help recreate their ancestor's experiences and travels. The *Arlington County Deed Books* provide much information on people and their ownership of land from Colonial times to the present. Many of them contain survey plats on individual lots and subdivision plans. There is one volume related to *Land Suits* extending from June 7, 1835 to May 1843. There are also two "Road Books" showing rights-of-ways (1890-1924) and a "book of six survey plats" (1852-1856) by the County Surveyors. Fairfax County Archives has *Deed* and *Minute Books, Records of Surveys* (1742-1856), and *Land Records of Long Standing* (1757) which are invaluable sources for research. The Archives in Alexandria City Hall, District of Columbia Court House (see the Office of the Surveyor land plats), Prince William and Stafford county Court Houses have land records pertaining to present-day Arlington County research. Another resource is the Virginia State Archives in Richmond where the Northern Neck Proprietorship Land Records and Survey Plats are located along with some "Loose Papers" from the Arlington County Archives.²⁹ The Virginiana Collection in the Arlington County Library has a collection of some 400 maps relating to Arlington County and environs. It also has some very useful references to maps.³⁰ There are over 5,000 maps of Virginia in the Library of Congress cartographic collections. It is estimated that at least 250 maps are related directly to Arlington County, and many other maps cover the environs.

The genealogist and local historian can make arrangements to obtain photocopies of maps or portions of a map or atlas to make his family history more complete. Facsimiles whether xerox (which is usually the cheapest method) or the more expensive photostats will usually suffice. Always make correct and complete citations of maps by title, authority, scale, date, and which collection or library it came from. Later, you may wish to see the original map again or to obtain better reproductions.

Genealogical research is growing in popularity. Maps can provide answers or clues to many questions a genealogist may have. The challenge of locating places and people from past generations can be very rewarding.

FOOTNOTES

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² *The Geography and Map Division Collections and Services*. Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1975, 42p.

³ Riley Moffat, "Genealogy and Maps." Western Association of Map Libraries *Information Bulletin*, 12(2):21-30, November, 1980; Gary L. Morgan, "Notes on Genealogy." *Prologue*. 9(3):178-182, Fall, 1977; Betty Kidd, "The Genealogist and the Map Curator." Association of Canadian Map Libraries *Bulletin* 19:20-23, September, 1975.

⁴ *The Times Index-Gazetteer of the World*. London, The Times Publishing Company, 1965.

⁵ *Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide*. Chicago, Rand McNally and Company, 1876-Annual.

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⁷ Richard B. Sealock and Pauline A. Seely, *Bibliography of Place Name Literature: United States and Canada*. 2nd Edition. Chicago, American Library Association, 1967.

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¹⁰ E. Kay Kirkham, *A Genealogical and Historical Atlas of the United States of America*. Logan, Utah, Everton, 1976.

¹¹ Richard H. Jackson, *Historical and Genealogical Atlas of the Eastern United States*. Bountiful, Utah, Horizon Publishers, 1976.

¹² *The Times Atlas of the World: Comprehensive Edition*. London, Times Books, 1980.

¹³ *National Geographic Atlas of the World*. Washington, D.C., National Geographic Society, 1975.

¹⁴ *The Columbia-Lippincott Gazetteer of the World*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1962.

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census. Census of Population. Volume 1: *Characteristics of the Population*. Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office. Also, *State Maps of County Subdivisions*.

¹⁶ John L. Androit, *Township Atlas of the United States*. 2nd Edition. McLean, Virginia, Androit Associates, 1979.

¹⁷ Joseph Nathan Kane, *The American Counties*. 3rd Edition, Metuchen, New Jersey; Scarecrow, 1973.

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²² Michael H. Shelley, *Ward Maps of United States Cities: A Selective Checklist of Pre-1900 Maps in the Library of Congress*. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, 1975.

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²⁴ Richard W. Stephenson, *Land Ownership Maps: A Checklist of Nineteenth Century United States County Maps in the Library of Congress*. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, 1967.

²⁵ Donald A. Wise, *Arlington County, Virginia, Land Ownership Map: 1669-1796*. 1:15,000, 1976; Color, 74 × 58 cm.

²⁶ Howell and Taylor, *Map of Alexandria County, Virginia*. 1:10, 800, 1900, Color, 154 × 101 cm.

²⁷ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, *Environs of Washington*. 1:10, 560. 1864, 56 × 81 cm.

²⁸ Franklin Survey Company, *Plat Book of Arlington County, Virginia*. 1935. 34 col. maps. Also 1943 and 1952 versions.

²⁹ Meredith B. Colket, *Inventory of Some Old Records of Arlington County, formerly Alexandria County, Virginia, and its Predecessors, 1772-1925*. mimeograph, 35p.

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