

**GSP RESEARCH TIP**

**LITTLE-KNOWN GENEALOGICAL RESOURCES  
AT THE FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA**

By

Robert Elwood Hoagland, C.G.R.S.

The Free Library of Philadelphia, Logan Square, Philadelphia (hereinafter FLP) offers some unusual sources and collections for the genealogist. Such sources as reverse telephone directories, patent indexes, neighborhood histories, indexes to pictures of early ships, ward maps, obituary indexes, and realty directories can be found in the various departments of the Central Library.

Although the FLP does not have a genealogy department as such, it has a small collection of reference books and source records pertaining to genealogy in the Social Science and History Department. Other holdings of this department will be discussed below.

The purpose of this article is to highlight some of the little-known genealogical resources of the FLP. In addition, some standard sources found in most major research libraries are mentioned in this article. The FLP is arranged by subject departments, and the ones most useful to the genealogical researcher are Business, Science and Industry; Data Base and Newspapers; Government Publications; Print and Picture; the Map Collection; and the Social Science and History Department.

**BUSINESS SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY (BSI)**

If you are doing twentieth-century research on a person who lived in Philadelphia, a quick way to see if he owned his home is to check the *Philadelphia Realty Directory and Service* held by BSI. Published annually, the department has years from 1926 to 1955. This directory is arranged in two major sections—one giving the location of properties (arranged alphabetically by streets and then numerically by house number), and the second showing the list of owners and their properties (arranged alphabetically by surnames). In addition, this directory gives the house number, date of deed, size of lot, assessment, and address of owner for each entry.

Philadelphia business directories can help you to trace your ancestor if he was in business in the City between 1832 and 1931. BSI has these directories with some years missing and an index to them. The directories are generally arranged in alphabetical order by type of business and contain the names and addresses of people in business for a given year. These annual directories are available for use on microfilm at the library's Data Base and Newspaper Center. Another useful reference work in BSI is a book entitled *Philadelphia Old and New, From the Cradling of Liberty To the Centralization of Commerce ...* compiled by The Consolidated Illustrating Co. (1895?). This offers brief accounts of Philadelphia businesses and manufacturers, giving the founder's name, date of founding, address of firm, type of product or service, current proprietors and sometimes the location of their homes.

**DATA BASE AND NEWSPAPER CENTER (DBN)**

DBN has an extensive collection of Philadelphia newspapers on microfilm from 1719 to present. Selected issues of local neighborhood newspapers from Philadelphia are also available on microfilm for research. This department has Philadelphia city directories on microfiche for the period from 1785 to 1860, with some gaps in the early years; and, on microfilm from 1861 to 1936, with occasional gaps. For urban research, the annual city directories are indispensable for placing a person in time and place and for linkage with census and other records. Also available on microfilm are telephone directories from the late 1800s to present for Philadelphia and suburbs.

## *The Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania*

The compilation of an index to death notices in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* is an ongoing project of DNB. To date, the department has indexed the years 1860/1861 to 1878. The index is titled *Philadelphia Inquirer Death Notice Index* and is available in hard copy on open shelves in the department (call number 016.92 P53i).

*[Note: Since this original Research Tip was written in 1991, the Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper (up to 1922) has become available at the fee-based online website of GenealogyBank.com. Also since 1991, original digitized images of the Philadelphia City Directories (up to 1922) have become available at the fee-based online website of Footnote.com]*

### **GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS DEPARTMENT (GPD) AND PATENT COLLECTION (PAC)**

Local, state, federal, and international government publications are housed in GPD. Although the Central Library has no original vital records, GPD maintains the Index to Registration of Deaths City of Philadelphia 1803-1860 compiled by the Works Project Administration and published by the Pennsylvania Historical Commission, no date (hereinafter Death Index). The Death Index contains transcriptions of Philadelphia Board of Health records called "cemetery returns" which are an early form of death record. The original records are housed partly in the Philadelphia City Archives and partly in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania and are available on microfilm at both of these repositories.

*[Note: Philadelphia Cemetery Returns and Death Records, 1803-1915, can now be found online, free of charge, at the LDS Family Search pilot website. See - <http://pilot.familysearch.org/recordsearch/start.html#start>]*

GPD also holds population census schedules for Philadelphia from 1790 to 1900 with the exception of 1890 which was destroyed by fire, and the department does have published indexes for Pennsylvania from 1790 to 1870. Also noteworthy for family researchers is an index to records of the Union and Confederate armies. This reference work is entitled *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* published under the direction of the Secretary of War, 70 vols. (1880-1901)

.Did you have an ancestor who was an inventor? PAC, located within GPD, can help you find him and an illustration of his invention. This collection contains approximately 5 million patents and 2 million trademarks. Patent files contain little biographical information, but they do give the inventor's name with city and state. PAC has indexes from 1790 to present.

**PRINT AND PICTURE DEPARTMENT (PIX)**PIX maintains an index to pictures of early ships. The index card gives the name of the ship and a call number and page of the book which contains a picture of the ship. These books are housed in closed stacks and must be brought to the reader through a request in BSI. Some of the books may no longer be available.

### **SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HISTORY DEPARTMENT (SSH)**

SSH has a small but useful collection of standard reference works for the researcher with Pennsylvania roots. Family histories and genealogies maintained by this department are kept in closed stacks but can be retrieved for study by finding their call number in the card catalog.

SSH has an excellent collection of books on the origins of surnames. There are more than four hundred volumes in this collection, and they deal with a wide range of family names from all corners of the world. Some street and neighborhood histories have been microfilmed and are available; for example, Arch Street, Chestnut Street and Kensington.

## *The Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania*

A run of "reverse telephone directories" from 1927 to 1970 is kept by SSH. The actual title of this publication is Philadelphia Address Telephone Directory, and it has been published variously twice a year and three times a year. Arranged alphabetically by street name and thereunder numerically by house number, this work gives the telephone customer's name, the address, and telephone number.

### **MAP COLLECTION (MAP)**

This special collection contains maps of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania which date from the early seventeenth century. Included are ward and fire insurance atlases, the latter sometimes showing ownership of properties after 1854.

Also of interest to the Philadelphia researcher are a number of publications dealing with street name changes such as Philadelphia Historical Commission, *Philadelphia Street Name Changes* (1960?); Robert J. McMullin, *The Neighborhoods of Philadelphia* (1975); Oscar B. Quinto, *History of Streets* (1961); *Tracing History by Philadelphia Streets*, 2 vols. (1941?); William Bucke Campbell, *Old Towns and Districts of Philadelphia* (1942). You can also find information about the FLP Map Collection online at [-http://libwww.library.phila.gov/collections/collectionDetail.cfm?id=16](http://libwww.library.phila.gov/collections/collectionDetail.cfm?id=16)

If you need help in locating any of the sources mentioned in this article, there are reference librarians in each department to assist you.

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