Northern Arizona Genealogical Society

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**SANBORN MAPS IN ACTION**

HISTORY OF FIRE INSURANCE MAPS

Fire insurance maps were created to provide information to fire insurance companies about buildings and neighborhoods. Companies used the information from these maps to set fire insurance rates. The earliest fire insurance maps were made for London. The earliest American city map is for Charleston, South Carolina, 1790. After the War of 1812 American companies began to produce fire insurance maps. In 1850 a large scale effort began to compile a fire insurance map of part of New York City. There were several publishers of fire insurance maps for the Aetna Fire Insurance Company. Surveyor D.A. Sanborn produced maps for Aetna and started his own mapping company in 1867. Eventually the Sanborn Map Company became the principal fire insurance mapping company in the United States. The Sanborn Map Company created fire insurance maps for over 12,000 cities and more than 700,000 map sheets.

Sources for the above information include an article in The Family History Newsletter of April, 1997, page 3 “Using Maps for Family and Local Historical Research, Fire Insurance Maps” (not currently digitized), and the Library of Congress Research Guide on Sanborn Maps (listed below).

INFORMATION IN FIRE INSURANCE MAPS

Note – created for business, not genealogists, but combined with other sources provides valuable information about dwellings, businesses, and neighborhoods. Because it was a tool for fire insurance it is for urban settings, not rural. Small towns and large cities were mapped. These maps did not include occupants’ names.

Building composition and footprint Number of stories

Function (dwelling or type of business) Roof material

Street names and location of buildings Churches, schools, public buildings

FINDING SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAPS

Library of Congress

Research Guide

<https://guides.loc.gov/fire-insurance-maps/sanborn>

Sanborn Maps Collection

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps>

> About this Collection

> Collection Items

> Articles and Essays

List of collections of duplicate Sanborn maps sent to North American Libraries:

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/about-this-collection/related-resources/>

See also Library of Congress Research Guide Other Fire Insurance Company Maps

<https://guides.loc.gov/fire-insurance-maps/other-companies>

UC Berkeley Earth Sciences and Map Library > Union List of Sanborn & Other Fire Insurance Maps

<https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/sanborn_union_list>

Cyndi’s List (Maps and Geography > Fire Insurance Maps)

ProQuest (available at some public libraries) > Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

\*\*\*Library of Congress video, Geography and Map Orientation: Fire Insurance Maps

<https://www.loc.gov/item/webcast-10471/>

Family Search> Research Wiki > Maps (section on Fire insurance maps with links)

Legacy Family Tree Webinars

Fire Insurance Maps: Google Maps of Their Day!

Jill Morelli 20 April 2016

Fire Insurance Maps, Their History and Applications, by Diane Oswald (1997)

$11.95 (includes postage) when ordered from publisher

<https://www.angelfire.com/biz/lacewing/fireinsurancemaps.html>

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sanborn Abbreviations and Map Legend

In black and white

<https://web.mit.edu/thecity/resources/abbreviations_for_sanborn_maps.pdf>

YouTube > Search > Fire Insurance Maps

<https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=fire+insurance+maps>