

## 7 Ways to Use Maps in Genealogy Research

### 1 IMAGINE HOMETOWNS

Maps help you visualize your ancestors' communities: their schools, churches, parks, businesses, terrain, roads and more.

### 2 DECIPHER BORDER CHANGES

Use maps to understand city, county, state, and township boundary lines, which help you determine which archives to contact for records.

### 3 TRACK A COMMUNITY

Maps published several years apart show you the development of your ancestral family's neighborhood over time, including street name changes and address renumberings.

### 4 FIND ANCESTRAL LAND

You'll need historical maps to pinpoint the location of your ancestor's property, and find deeds and land records.

### 5 MAP OUT OTHER DOCUMENTS

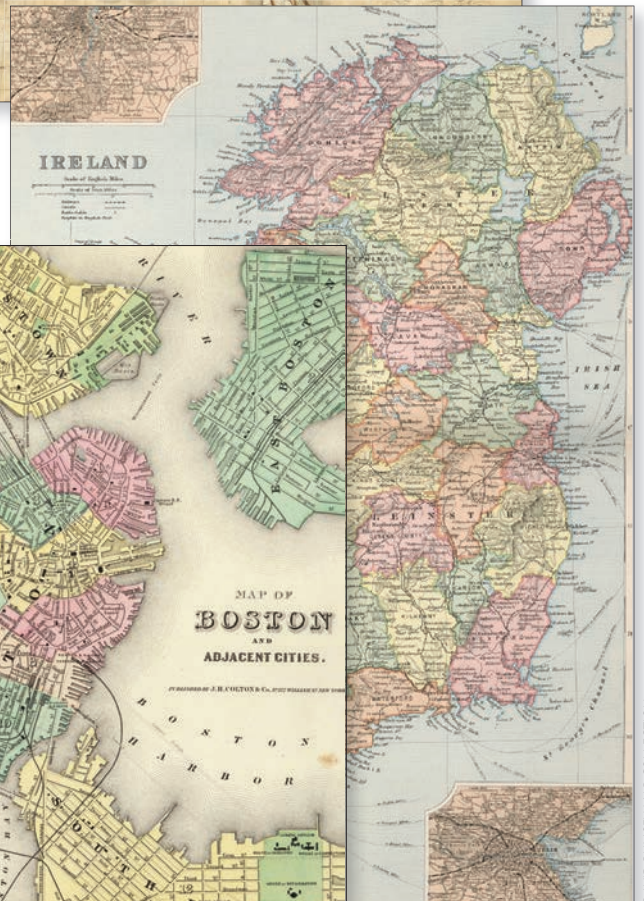
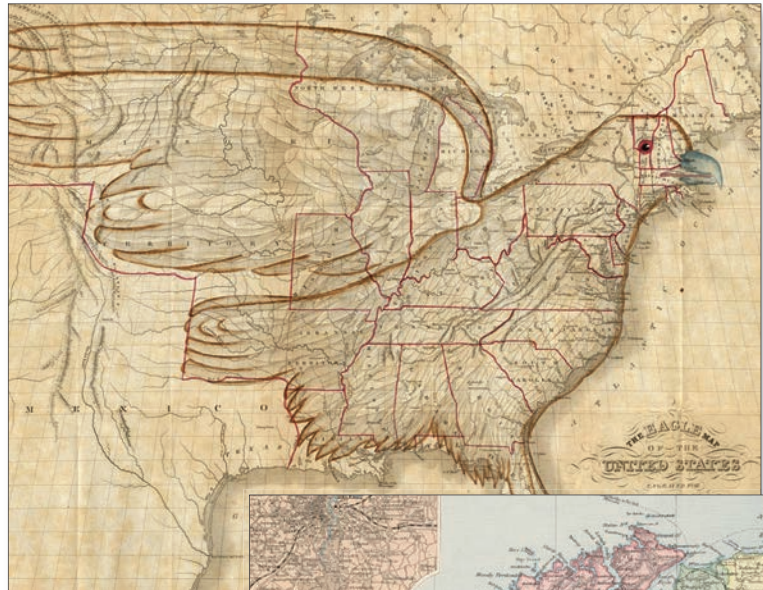
Use maps to locate residences and businesses listed in city directories and census records.

### 6 BROWSE CENSUSES

Look for hard-to-find ancestors in censuses using census enumeration district (ED) maps.

### 7 PLAN TRAVEL

Consult maps (both historical and contemporary) when planning visits to your ancestors' hometowns.

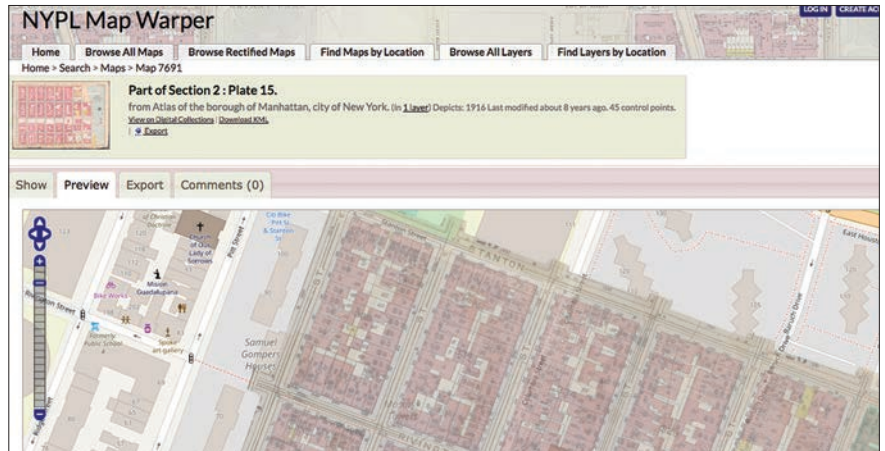


# MAP OVERLAY TOOLS

Tools that let you overlay maps on top of each other make it easy to compare old and new maps to see how an area changed and learn, for example, where your ancestor's address in 1870 is located now. These three tools are tops for making map overlays.

## NYPL MAP WARPERS

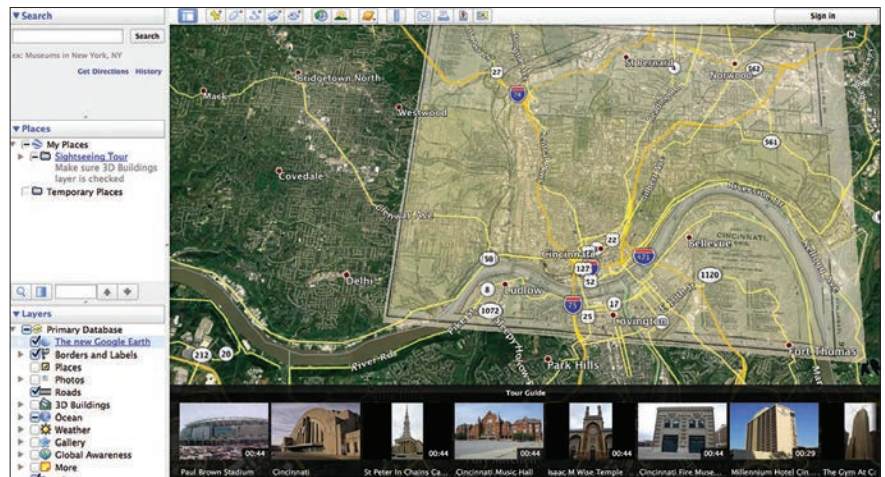
We've mentioned the New York Public Library <[www.nypl.org/about/divisions/map-division](http://www.nypl.org/about/divisions/map-division)> as a great resource for finding digitized maps. But the organization also has a valuable Map Warper <[maps.nypl.org/warper](http://maps.nypl.org/warper)> that will help you view historical maps overtop modern maps from the comfort of your browser. Simply log in, select a map from the NYPL's collection, and digitally align ("rectify") points in the map with coordinates on a modern geographic place. You can also view maps that other users have rectified.



Overlaying old and modern maps can help you locate an ancestor's residence.

## GOOGLE EARTH PRO

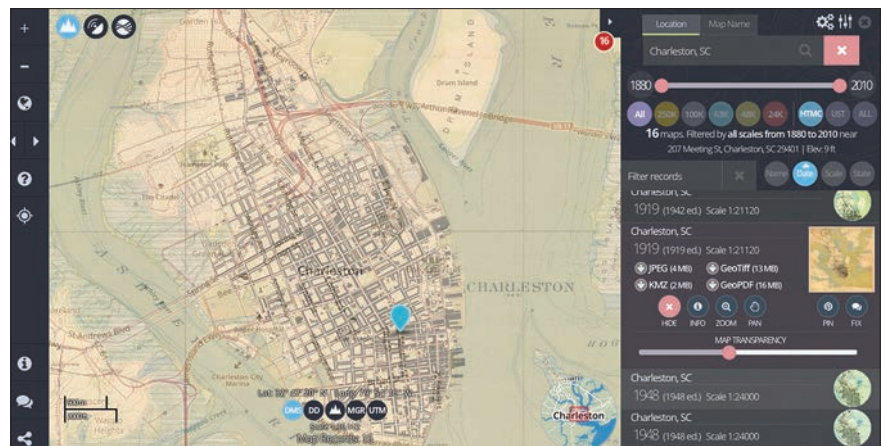
One of the most powerful mapping tools allows you to view historical maps over top of Google Maps. Once you launch the free Google Earth Pro on your desktop (download it here <[www.google.com/earth/versions](http://www.google.com/earth/versions)>), you'll have the option to add an Image Overlay. Select the map you'd like to view, then adjust the map's position and rotation to match it up with the modern view. You can also adjust the map's opacity, making it easier for you to switch between the historical and modern views.



Google Earth lets you import old maps to overlay with modern satellite imagery.

## USGS TOPOVIEW

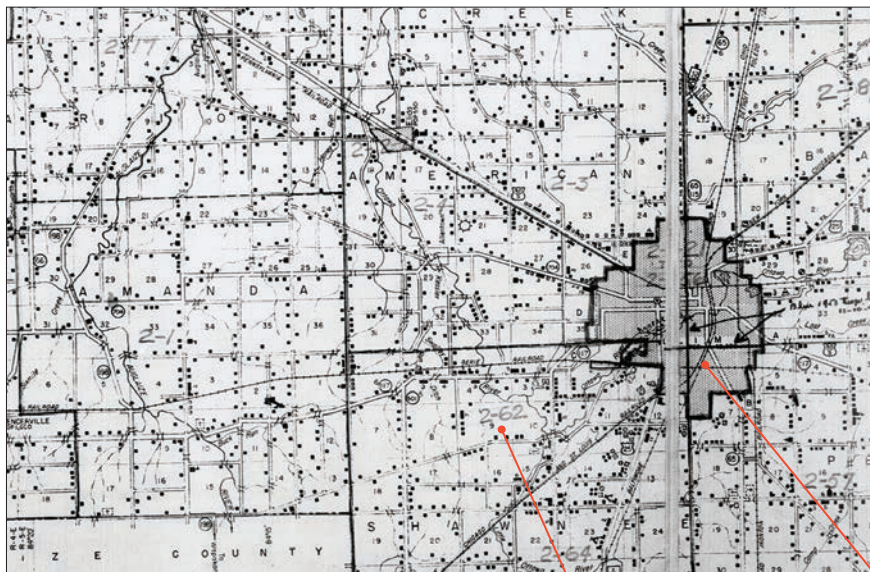
The US Geological Survey (USGS) has been creating topographical maps of the country for more than 125 years, and it's made much of its collection viewable over modern maps. Visit the topoView <[ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer](http://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer)> and type in a location. Select the location from the dropdown menu, then view the available historical maps in the right-hand column. Use filters to narrow your results by name, date, scale (e.g., 24k or 250k), or state. Click Show to see the image over a modern map, and adjust the map's transparency as necessary. You can even download the historical map for free in one of several different file types.



You'll see the lay of the land with topoView. Here, a 1919 USGS map of Charleston, S.C., overlays a modern map of the area.

# 7 ESSENTIAL HISTORICAL MAPS

## 1 Enumeration district maps



Source: National Archives and Records Administration

ED numbers are typically handwritten and larger than other digits you might see, such as ward numbers or sections of a township.

### DETAILS

**Created:** To organize enumeration efforts during the US census

**Notes:** These maps indicate how a region was divided for census purposes in a given year. Large numbers indicate the enumeration district (ED). Find your ancestor's ED on the map, then browse census records for hard-to-find families. You can find ED maps for 1900–1940 at FamilySearch <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>.

### Research uses

- Finding ancestors hiding in the census
- Tracking communities over time

Higher-population areas require more EDs, and so you may need to consult an inset (such as here, where EDs 2-21 through 2-56 are on a separate map).

## 2 Ethnographic maps



Source: David Rumsey Map Collection

Each color represents a particular ethnic group. The designations could be specific (like purple for Greek) or broad (like yellow for Slavic).

### DETAILS

**Created:** To study population trends

**Notes:** These maps are usually included in atlases. They typically have color-coded regions indicating various ethnic groups, so be sure to consult the map's key.

### Research uses

- Tracking migration groups
- Learning more about communities
- Finding ancestral hometowns

Areas with many colors, such as this portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that has tan (Magyar/Hungarian), pink (German), yellow (Slavic), and blue (Romanian), indicate a more diverse region.



## 5 Population density maps



Source: David Rumsey Map Collection

Look at the map's key to see what each shade of a color represents. Typically, darker shades indicate higher population densities.

### DETAILS

**Created:** To study population trends

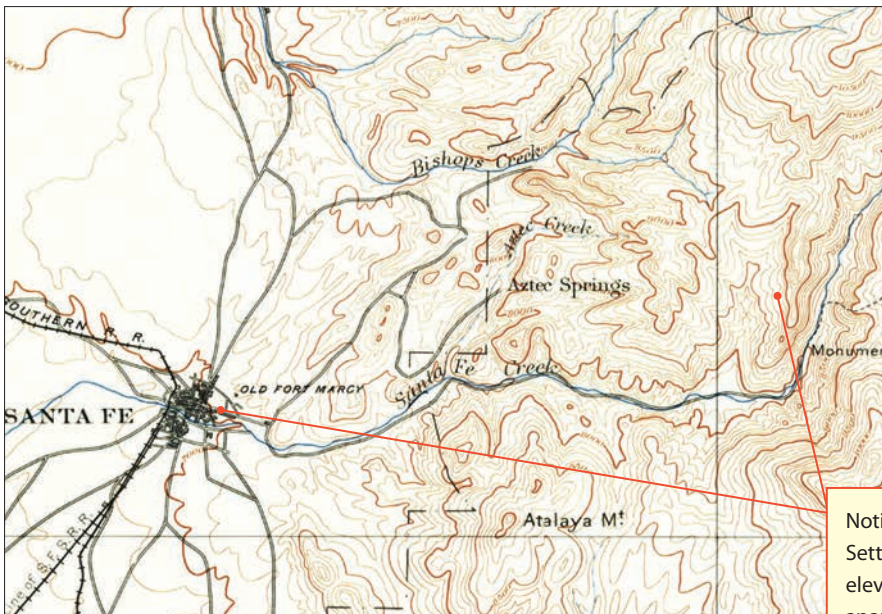
**Notes:** These maps display population density using various shades of a particular color. Like ethnographic maps, these were often included as part of larger atlases. For US-based density maps, look for source information—these maps often were created by compiled data from a particular federal census.

### Research uses

- Learning more about ancestral communities, particularly during census years
- Tracing migration patterns

As you might expect, the map indicates higher population density in urban areas (such as around Philadelphia) than in rural areas (such as eastern Kentucky).

## 6 Topographic maps



Source: U.S. Geological Survey

### DETAILS

**Created:** To survey towns and regions

**Notes:** Organizations like the USGS created these, using contour lines to represent elevation. The closer the contour lines, the steeper the terrain. View old USGS maps at [livingatlas.arcgis.com/topoexplorer/index.html](http://livingatlas.arcgis.com/topoexplorer/index.html).

### Research uses

- Learning more about communities
- Understanding town histories
- Tracking land records

Notice how terrain affected human behavior. Settlers founded the city of Santa Fe at moderate elevations (i.e., where contour lines are farther apart on this map), rather than in the mountainous east (i.e., where contour lines are close together).



# GLOSSARY OF MAP TERMS

Term	Definition
aliquot parts	In a rectangular survey system, a subdivision of a section of land using directions and fractions to indicate the land's location: W½ SE¼ represents the west half of the southeast quarter of a township.
acre	Unit of land measurement equal to 43,560 square feet.
atlas	A collection of maps, usually from a specific country or region.
BLM	Bureau of Land Management, a government entity responsible for allocating parcels of land.
bounty land	Land granted by the Colonial or federal governments as a reward for military service.
contour lines	Boundaries on a map that indicate specific altitudes.
coordinates	Numerals used to objectively record a place's location on a grid, generally measured in degrees of latitude and longitude.
enumeration district	Divisions of each county and some large cities used to make census-taking more efficient and accurate. For large cities, the boundaries of enumeration districts often match those of wards or precincts.
gazetteer	A geographical dictionary; a book giving names and descriptions of places, usually in alphabetical order. If you can't pinpoint an ancestor's town, consult a gazetteer published during his lifetime.
homestead	A home on land obtained from the US government through one of several Homestead Acts. The homesteader agreed to live on the land and make improvements, such as adding buildings and clearing fields.
key	The section of a map that indicates what is meant by the map's various colors, lines, symbols or shading.
land grant	Public land given to an individual by the government, usually as a reward for military service.
latitude	A measurement of distance north or south of the equator, expressed in terms of degrees and minutes.
longitude	A measurement of distance east or west of the Prime Meridian, which passes through Greenwich, England.
map	A visual depiction of a place or region, generally drawn to scale and featuring icons, symbols or colors.
meridian	An imaginary north-south line; a principal meridian is the starting point for a rectangular land survey.

Term	Definition
metes and bounds	A land survey method employing compass directions, landmarks and distances between points.
plat	A drawing showing the boundaries and features of a piece of property; in genealogy, creating such a drawing from a metes-and-bounds or legal land description as a surveyor would have done.
public land	Land originally owned by the federal government and sold to individuals.
quarter section	In the rectangular survey system, one-fourth of a section of land, equal to 160 acres.
range	A row or column of townships lying east or west of the principal meridian and numbered successively to the east and to the west from the principal meridian.
rectangular survey system	The land survey method the US General Land Office used most often. It employs base lines, one east-west and one north-south, that cross at a known geographic position. In this system, townships—each generally 24 miles square—are described in relation to the base lines and subdivided into sections.
Sanborn	Shorthand for the Sanborn Map Co., an organization that created standardized maps for many towns and cities throughout the United States for insurance purposes. These maps are among the most complete and useful for researchers.
scale	The ratio used when creating a map, allowing the map to preserve a region's relative size. Map scales are given as ratios or fractions, such as 1:10,000, or one centimeter on the map representing 10,000 centimeters (100 meters) of land.
section	A division of land within a township that measures one square mile (640 acres)—about ¼ of a township. Sections were further subdivided into half sections, quarter sections and sixteenth sections, or into lots.
state land	Land originally owned by a state or another entity, rather than the federal government.
topography	A study of a region's terrain. Topographic maps show an area's relief, or the changes in its terrain as measured by altitude.
township	In a government survey, a square tract 6 miles on each side (36 square miles); a name given to the civil and political subdivisions of a county.
tract	A parcel of land that isn't fully contained within a single section. Tracts within a township are numbered beginning with 37 to avoid confusion with section numbers.

# Magnificent Moments in Map History

- 150** Ptolemy defines the system of projections and coordinates still used in cartography today.
- 1569** Gerardus Mercator publishes his world map, using a method later deemed the Mercator projection. This map was revolutionary for sailors and is still used today, but its scale led to size distortions of places farther away from the Equator.
- 1570** *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, considered the first modern atlas, is published.
- 1879** The US Congress establishes the Geological Survey (USGS) to inventory western lands.
- 1881** Publishing company Rand McNally produces its first world atlas.
- 1884** At the International Meridian Conference, 25 nations adopt the prime meridian in Greenwich, England, as the “common zero” of longitude.

## KEY RESOURCES FOR ONLINE MAPS

**David Rumsey Map Collection** <[www.davidrumsey.com](http://www.davidrumsey.com)>

**Historic Map Works** <[www.historicmapworks.com](http://www.historicmapworks.com)>

**The Library of Congress** <[www.loc.gov/maps](http://www.loc.gov/maps)>

**New York Public Library** <[www.nypl.org/about/divisions/map-division](http://www.nypl.org/about/divisions/map-division)>

**Old Maps Online** <[www.oldmapsonline.org](http://www.oldmapsonline.org)>

**Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection** <[legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps](http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps)>

**US Geological Survey Historical Topographic Map Explorer** <[livingatlas.arcgis.com/topoexplorer/index.html](http://livingatlas.arcgis.com/topoexplorer/index.html)>

- 1963** Arthur H. Robinson creates the Robinson projection, which shows the entire world to scale in one map.
- 2001** Google launches the first version of Google Earth, allowing users to access satellite imagery. The navigation tool Google Maps is released a few years later.

## RESOURCES

### Websites

**Atlas of Historical County Boundaries** <[digital.newberry.org/ahcb](http://digital.newberry.org/ahcb)>

**Bureau of Land Management General Land Office Records** <[glorerecords.blm.gov](http://glorerecords.blm.gov)>

**Cyndi's List: Maps & Geography** <[www.cyndislist.com/maps](http://www.cyndislist.com/maps)>

**Euratlas: Historical Maps** <[www.euratlas.net/history/index.html](http://www.euratlas.net/history/index.html)>

**FamilySearch Wiki: United States Maps** <[www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Maps](http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Maps)>

**Google Earth** <[earth.google.com/web](http://earth.google.com/web)>

**Google Maps** <[www.google.com/maps](http://www.google.com/maps)>

**Historic Map Works** <[www.historicmapworks.com](http://www.historicmapworks.com)>

**Historical US County Boundary Maps by Randy Majors** <[www.randymajors.org/maps](http://www.randymajors.org/maps)>

**HistoryGeo** <[www.historygeo.com](http://www.historygeo.com)>

**HistoryPin** <[www.historypin.org/en](http://www.historypin.org/en)>

**National Archives and Records Administration** <[www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)>

**Old Maps Online** <[www.oldmapsonline.org](http://www.oldmapsonline.org)>

**Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection** <[www.lib.utexas.edu/maps](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps)>

**RootsMapper** <[www.rootsmapper.com](http://www.rootsmapper.com)>

**The US Geological Survey** <[www.usgs.gov](http://www.usgs.gov)>

**Using Maps in Genealogy** <[www.census.gov/history/pdf/mapsgenealogy.pdf](http://www.census.gov/history/pdf/mapsgenealogy.pdf)>

**WhatWasThere** <[www.whatwasthere.com](http://www.whatwasthere.com)>

### Books

**The Family Tree Historical Maps Book** by Allison Dolan and the Editors of *Family Tree Magazine* (Family Tree Books)

**The Family Tree Historical Maps Book: Europe** by Allison Dolan and the Editors of *Family Tree Magazine* (Family Tree Books)

**The Family Tree Historical Atlas of American Cities** by Allison Dolan and the Editors of *Family Tree Magazine* (Family Tree Books)

**Map Guide to the U.S. Federal Censuses, 1790-1920** by William Thorndale and William Dollarhide (Genealogical Publishing Co.)

**Walking with Your Ancestors: A Genealogist's Guide to Using Maps and Geography** by Melinda Kashuba (Betterway Books)