

## Sanborn Maps

- 1867-1977
- 50,000 maps with 700,000 individual sheets
- 21 x 25 in. Maps with Scale: 50 feet = 1 inch
- Color-coded according to construction material
- Used by insurance companies to assess fire risk for properties
- Primarily commercial buildings & churches; some residential
- Common abbreviations:

Dw or D= dwelling  
S= store  
Sal= saloon  
B & S = boot & shoe  
Clo= clothing  
D.G. =dry goods  
Gro=grocery  
Whol=wholesale  
Rest= restaurant  
W. Ho. = warehouse  
# outside = street address  
# inside = dimensions / stories

**For full list see Sources**



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## Sanborn Maps: A Genealogist's Guide

Sanborn maps can be as useful as Google maps, providing detailed information of cities and towns across the United States. Their purpose was to document structures that were insured against fire damage. The maps were drawn by hand, and revised as needed, charting changes. Go to your local library and see these gems in person!

Sanborn Maps exist for many small and almost every large city in the U.S. and some in Canada. Anywhere buildings were insured against fire, Sanborn mapped. Other companies existed, as do their maps, but Sanborn quickly became and remained the industry standard into the 1970s.

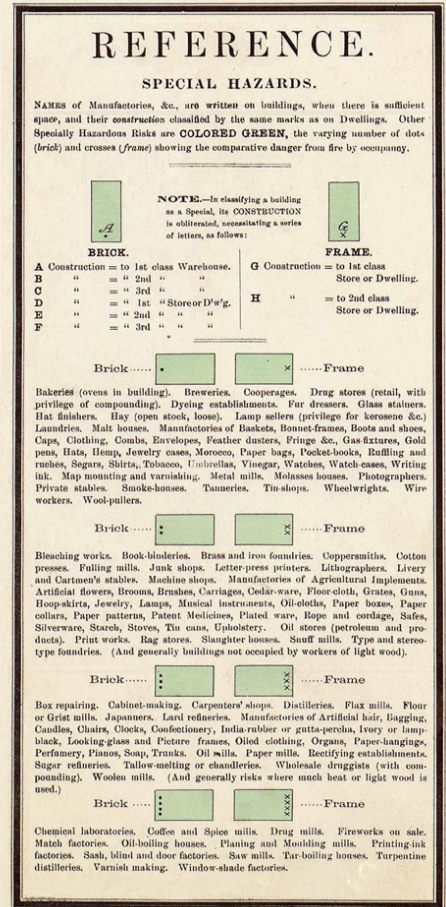
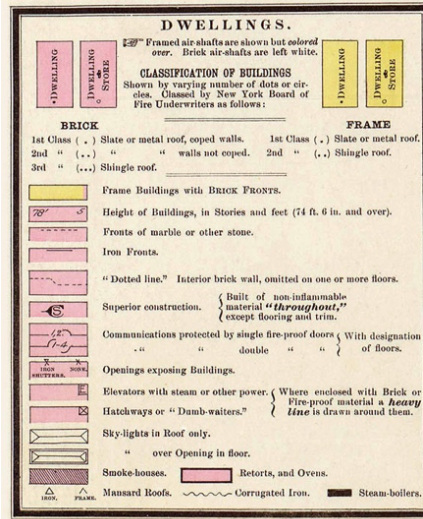
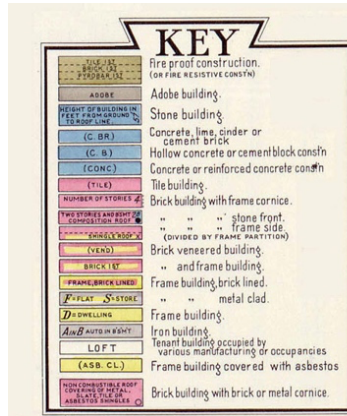
In the 1950s the map books decreased in size to make them easier to publish. Inside the cover of the smaller editions is an excellent guide to their use. It has been digitized by the Penn State University Library [here](#).

### Michelle's Tips

1. Maps include details such as a street & map index, an expanded city center map, and details such as equipment necessary for firefighting (e.g., phones, firemen & water).
2. Sanborn maps are very helpful if you are doing building or property research. Sometimes they include genealogy gems such as the name of the company or business owner, as well as date of construction.

3. When did this addition, garage, or second floor get added to this house? Building changes might tell you when the family grew, took in boarders or other relatives. Coupled with city directories you can discover who lived in the house and when/if others of working age lived with your relatives.

4. Comparing different years of maps can help you to understand your ancestor's neighborhood or city and may provide clues to city changes that affected their lives such as the

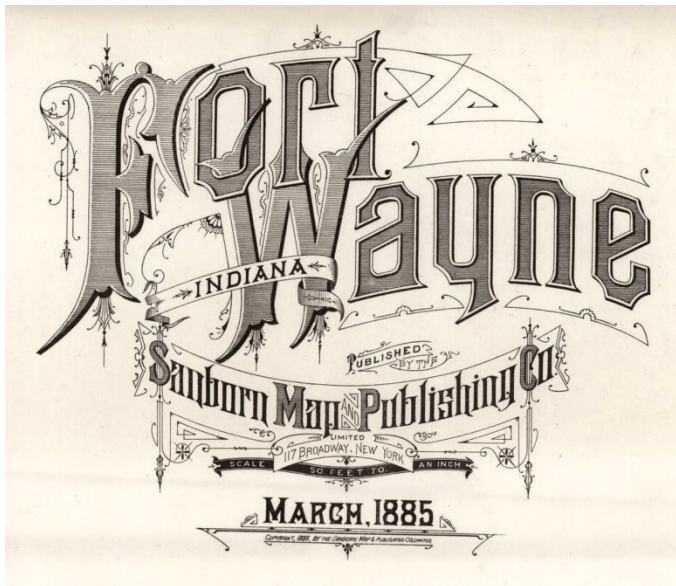


construction of a new school or church.

5. Compare maps with available photos. This is especially helpful if your ancestor lived in town or owned a downtown business.

6. Because of copyright restrictions, you will likely need to search more than one location to find all the maps of an area. Check the sources below.

7. Check out this website of Bloomington, IN current GIS map overlaid with 1907 Sanborn.

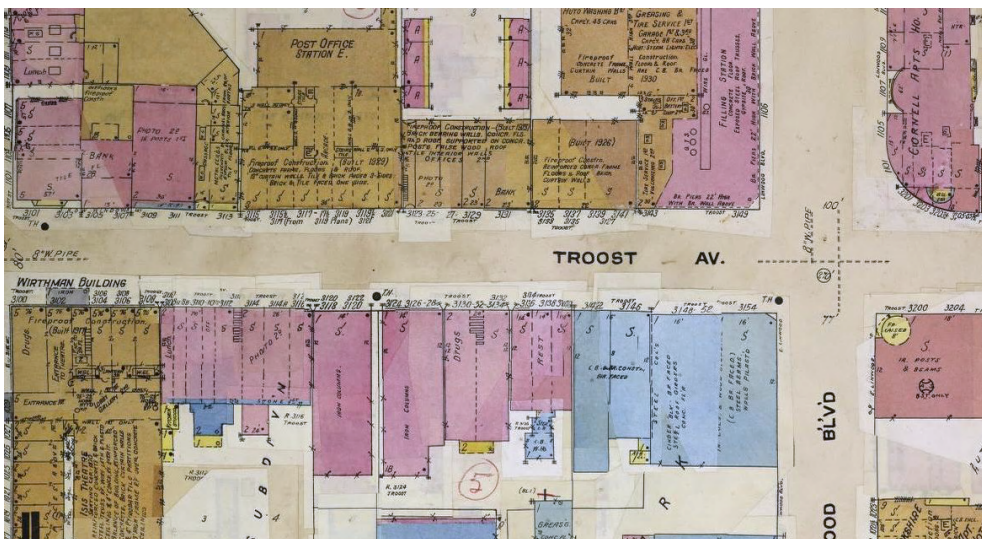


<https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=840a5e5ecef14f839b24d6c8029f542&extent=-86.5754,39.1551,-86.4935,39.1832>



## SOURCES

1. Go local. Check your local library for access to the **ProQuest** (black & white) & **Historical Information Gatherers** – aka FIMO (mostly color) databases. Both hold the copyrights to modern Sanborn Maps.
2. **Library of Congress** database [includes all color maps that are no longer under copyright]:  
[loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/about-this-collection/](https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/about-this-collection/)
3. State libraries and archives such as  
**MO Digital Heritage**: [https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/mdh\\_splash/default.asp?coll=fireinsmaps](https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/mdh_splash/default.asp?coll=fireinsmaps)  
**Univ of MO**: <https://dl.mospace.umsystem.edu/mu/islandora/object/mu%3A138690>  
**Univ of AL**: [http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/FireInsurance/1\\_County%20Index.html](http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/FireInsurance/1_County%20Index.html)  
**Univ of Florida**: <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/results?filter=subjects%3AMaps&q=jacksonville>  
**IN State Library**: <https://www.in.gov/library/collections-and-services/indiana/map-collection/sanborn/#:~:text=The%20Sanborn%20Fire%20Insurance%20Maps,produced%20for%20some%20Indiana%20towns>  
**Univ of IN**: <https://libraries.indiana.edu/union-list-sanborn-maps>
4. Other online sources  
**Newberry** <https://www.newberry.org/fire-insurance-maps>  
**Digital Public Library** <https://dp.la/search?q=fire+insurance+maps>  
**Comprehensive list** [lib.berkeley.edu/EART/sanborn\\_union\\_list](http://lib.berkeley.edu/EART/sanborn_union_list)  
**Large collection** [csun.edu/map-library/collections/sanborns](http://csun.edu/map-library/collections/sanborns)  
**Abbreviations**: [https://web.mit.edu/thecity/resources/abbreviations\\_for\\_sanborn\\_maps.pdf](https://web.mit.edu/thecity/resources/abbreviations_for_sanborn_maps.pdf)  
**Penn State digitized guide to Sanborn Map usage**:  
<https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/25563>



Troost Avenue, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Kansas City, Jackson, Clay, and Platte Counties, Missouri. Sanborn Map Company, Vol. 4, 1909 - Feb 1951, Sheet 465. Library of Congress. Accessed online 20 Sep 2023 at <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/?all=true&fa=location:missouri%7Clocation:kansas+city>