

CITY DIRECTORIES

This reference guide provides an overview for accessing city directories from the Archives. City directories are available for self-serve access in the Reading Room either in hard-copy bound volumes or from the microfilm copies.

CITY DIRECTORIES

1860-1996

Annual directories produced by private firms listing names of residents, properties, and businesses. Similar to telephone books, directories are indexed by street name as well as by surnames of residents. Directories can be used to determine approximate year a property was built, addresses, names of residents, years of residency, occupations, and the types of businesses concentrated in an area. Additionally, some years are B.C. directories and cover other municipalities. Directories were compiled by private firms for business purposes so they are convenient and broad in scope, but not authoritative and there are demographic omissions.

- **Demographic omissions** include married women, children, and individuals who spoke no English
- **Married women's names** were excluded or represented as follows: not included before 1934; given name listed secondary to husband starting from 1934; if working, listed as a separate entry from 1976-1996
- **Children** are not listed
- **Individuals of Chinese or Japanese background** not otherwise represented in the main alphabetical listing might appear in a separate directory section, "Chinese and Japanese Firms"; found in directories up to 1923
- **Ethnicity** could have been assumed incorrectly
- Occasionally, there may be an **addendum** to the alphabetical sequence
- The **organization of information** contained in the directories may vary significantly among volumes and publishers e.g. Avenues listed by number (12th Avenue) in one volume vs. avenues listed alphabetically in another (Twelfth)
- Discrepancies may be found year to year in **spelling** (e.g. "Mac" vs. "Mc")
- Information was likely **collected in the year prior** to publication

City directories for the years 1860-1955 have also been digitized and can be [viewed online through the Vancouver Public Library](#).

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Using the City Directories



City directory volumes in the Reading Room

Hard copy directories can be accessed in the Reading Room. These volumes are well sought-after and have become fragile with age and use. **Please handle with care:**

DO NOT

- Rest your arms or lean on the directories
- Take notes on top of the directories
- Rest directories anywhere except on tabletops or book cradles
- Turn pages quickly or by licking your fingers



What **not** to do with the directories ✘



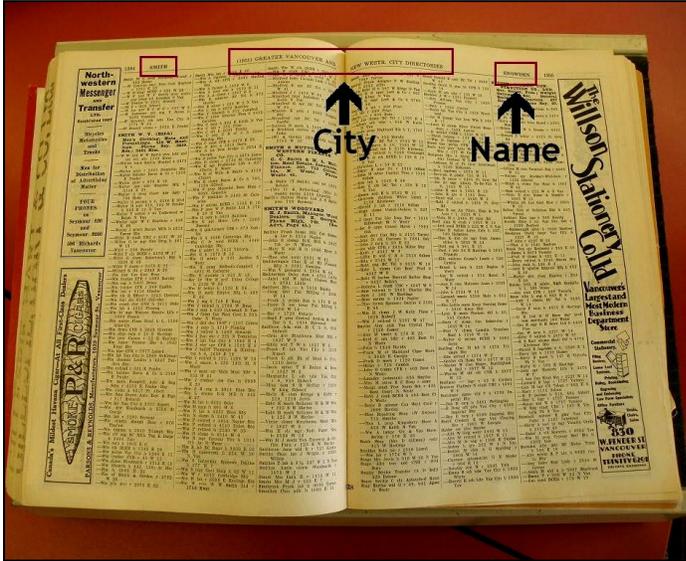
Correct usage of the directories ✔

CITY DIRECTORIES

To Search by Name

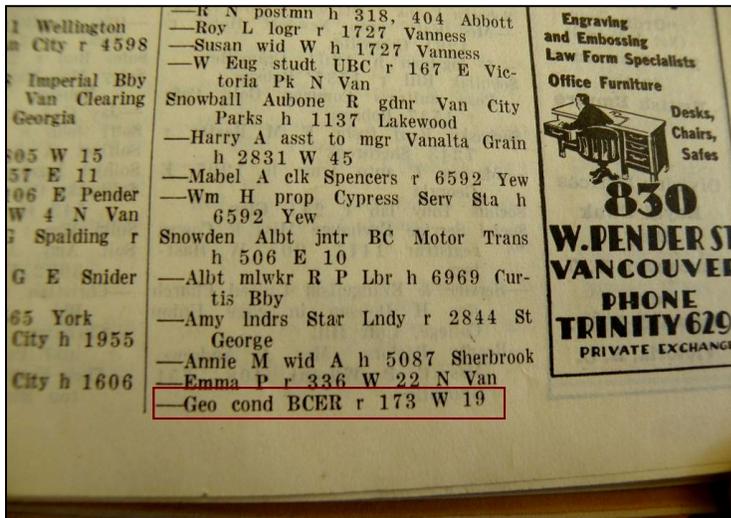
E.g. George Snowden, a Vancouver resident in 1931:

Look up the name **Snowden** in the 1931 city directory, under the Alphabetical List of Names. Sometimes several cities may be listed in the same directory. Be sure to search the correct city section.



The Alphabetical List of Names section in the 1931 directory

Under Snowden, search for the name George. Next to the name, you will find George Snowden's occupation and home address.

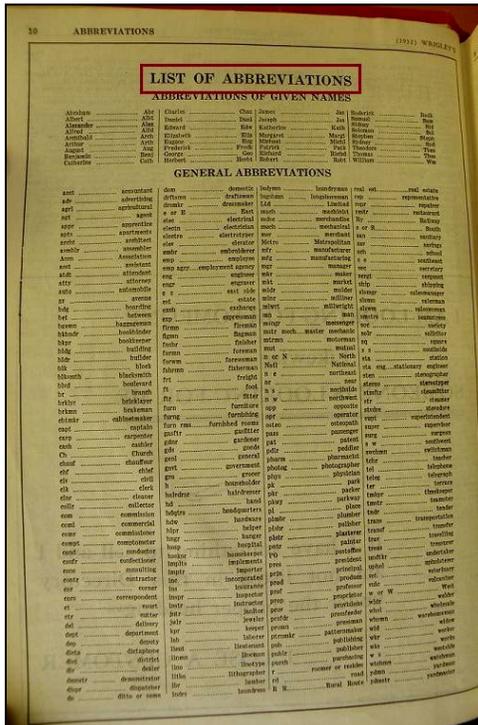


Entry for George Snowden in the 1931 city directory

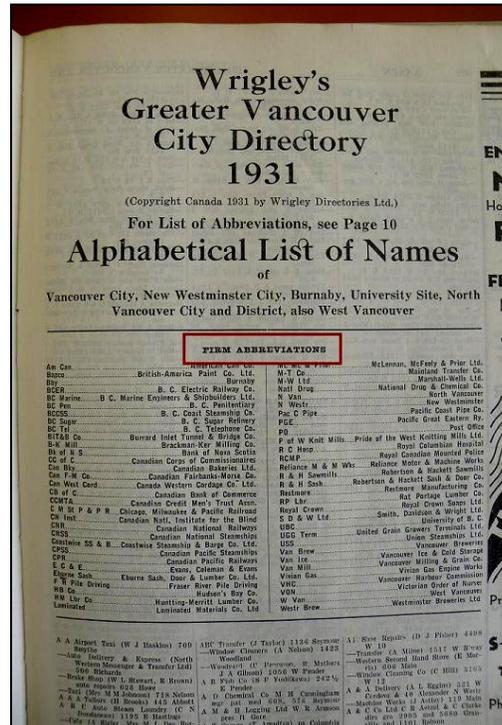
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Searching by Name continued

A list of abbreviations can sometimes be found near the start of the directory, and a list of firm abbreviations can sometimes be found at the start of the alphabetical listing. Please note that not all directories will have these lists, however, the Reading Room has an example copy available.



Directory List of Abbreviations



Directory Firm Abbreviations

In the Snowden example, “Geo” is short for “George”, “cond” stands for “conductor”; “BCER” refers to the B.C. Electric Railway Company, and “r” indicates that George Snowden was a roomer or renter at the address, not the homeowner (shown by the symbol “h” or “*”).

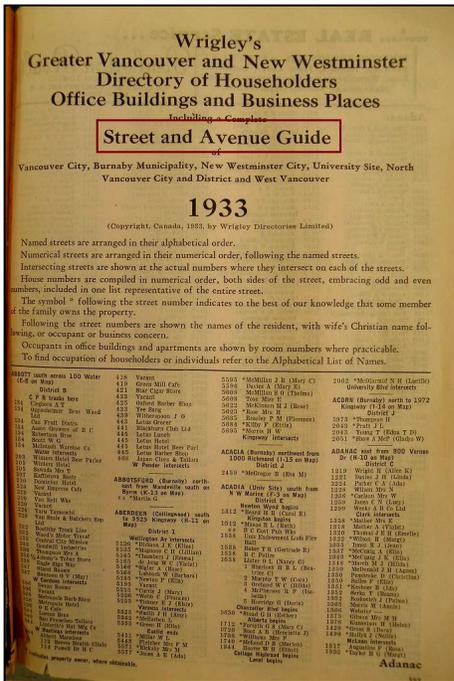
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To Search by Address

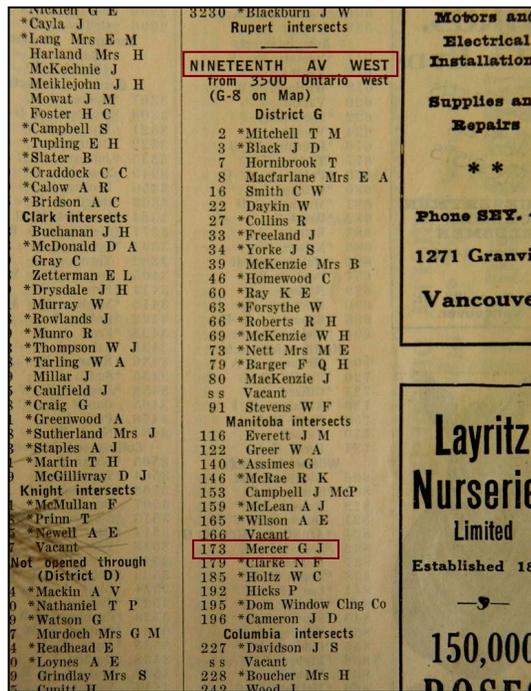
E.g. 173 W 19th Avenue

Look up the street name in the directory's Street and Avenue Guide.

In the majority of directories, numbered avenues come after alphabetical street names. However, there are some exceptions. For instance, the 1912 and 1913 directories spell out the numbered streets and organized them alphabetically among all street names. E.g. "Eighteenth Avenue" is listed in the "E" section.



1933 Street and Avenue Guide section



Entry for 173 West 19th Avenue

In looking up the W 19th address, the entry lists a "G. J. Mercer" was an occupant at this property but not the homeowner.

Please contact the Archives for further questions about our holdings or to discuss your research topic with an archivist.

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