Family History
Queensland Post Office Directories (1868-1949)

This information is based on Fisher, R. (1988). Directories to people, places and patterns in Queensland since 1868. In R. Fisher, & M. Jenner (Eds.), *Brisbane: Archives and approaches II* (pp. 75-94). Brisbane: Brisbane History Group.

Post office directories, trade directories and almanacs are useful for tracing the location and movements of people and businesses in the past. A listing can confirm a person's address at a certain time, and may provide clues as to their occupation or year of death.

Directories usually contain alphabetical lists of occupants' names and addresses, but directory contents and their arrangement varied over time with different publishers. While some directories contain a single alphabetical index, others arrange lists geographically, under town or suburb names, or in street number order under street names.

Almanacs, such as Pugh's Almanac or Slater's Queensland Almanac, provide basic information about people, places, services and events. They may relate to the whole State or specific regional areas but, unlike directories, did not generally aim at an alphabetical listing of householders and others by place, address, function or occupation.

Queensland Post Office Directories

Queensland Post Office Directories is a collective name given to a chronological collection of several Queensland directories issued by different publishers between 1868 and 1949. The directories' years and publishers are:
- 1868 – Meyer
- 1874 – Bailliere
- 1876 – Shaw
- 1878-1879 – McNaught
- 1883-1899 – Watson to Weatherill
    - 1883-1886 Watson
    - 1887 Qld POD Co
    - 1888-1891 Hollander
    - 1892-1899 Weatherill
- 1889-1899 – Wise series 1
- 1900-1949 – Wise series 2

Arrangement varies throughout the editions, but generally includes a trade/professional directory and an alphabetical section, which is sometimes split between Brisbane and country regions.

Purpose of directories

The purpose of the directories was to:

- provide finding aids (indexes) to their contents
- provide details about official and commercial services
- list persons/bodies by their occupational/functional role (subject directories)
- list persons/bodies by their geographical location (place directories).

Wise series 2, in 1900, noted that their classification enabled enquirers to see:
- the names of householders or traders in a particular town
- the address and occupation of any resident in the colony
- the number of persons in Queensland in any one trade or calling.

Directories were geared to the business and consumer market, so most early directories presented Brisbane, then larger towns, in more detail than the rest of Queensland.

Content of directories

1868 Meyer provides only an alphabetical list of names with vocation and address under each town, and a consolidated alphabetical list for Queensland. There is no street listing or self-index.

1874 Bailliere contains alphabetical and vocational lists for Queensland, but none for towns. There is no street listing or self-index.

1876 Shaw added street listing and self-index. Problems include:
- Heads of households/businesses/other bodies are listed with occupation/function in running order per street, but these details are often inaccurate or incomplete.
- Whole streets are inverted, their sides muddled and cross streets omitted.
- It is largely limited to Brisbane and inner suburbs, except for an alphabetical list of squatters with station names.

1878/1879 McNaught
- It added more indexes, information and subject directories, but has geographic limitations.
- Brisbane people are street listed more precisely: Names are alphabetically listed with occupation and address for outer suburbs from Albion to Woolloongabba.
- Country towns are omitted, in keeping with this directory's urban focus.

1883-1899 Watson to Weatherill
(Watson 1883-1886, Qld POD Co 1887, Hollander 1888-1891, Weatherill 1892-1899)

- The series provides similar indexes, information and subject directories

- They continued the trend to greater accuracy and completeness for Brisbane city and suburbs, progressively street listing areas further out and consolidating information with other listings.
- From 1890, the street directory is divided into north and south Brisbane with their respective suburbs, while other suburbs are arranged within their local authority divisions (e.g. Paddington is listed under Ithaca).
- Watson 1883-1886 and Qld POD Co 1887 include a country guide, which was continued by Hollander 1881-1891 and Weatherill 1892-1899.
- Country people for most towns are selected and classified according to occupation/office, not listed more comprehensively or alphabetically until the last Weatherill editions.

1889-1899 Wise series 1

- In country towns, inhabitants are listed individually by name, with occupation, office and address.
- Information and subject sections are as detailed as the Weatherill directories.
- Street listings for north and south Brisbane, their suburbs and Sandgate don't generally cite occupation/office of private individuals.
- Sections for city and suburbs are useful as a complement or corrective to the other series.

1900-1949 Wise series 2

- This series continues previous practices.
- It begins to street list larger towns, such as Charters Towers and Ipswich.
- Lota, Manly and Wynnum are combined with Sandgate in a separate seaside suburban section.
- 1941-1949 information about private individuals and household heads is omitted, but trades, professions, businesses and organisations are covered.

Reflecting their commercial purpose, publishers reduce and rearrange all sections accordingly. This devalues 20th Century directories as an historical source, compared with earlier directories.

Compilation

The research value of directories is affected by the manner in which they were compiled. Problems noted by the publishers included inadequate information because of the:

- lack of local precedent
- numbers of middlemen involved
- dispersion of sources
- scattered nature of the community

Publishers also faced the problem of time. As directories were published early in the year, preparation was undertaken in the previous year and finalised as close as practicable to publication, often making for hasty compilation.

Contributions were made by government departments, most importantly the post office, which provided reliable and necessary information. There was little sign of post office assistance for the early directories e.g. Shaw 1876, McNaught 1878 and Wise series 1 1889-1899. Several early directories noted the roles of the Under Secretary of the GPO, Brisbane letter-carriers and Queensland colonial post masters. Consequently, postal district boundaries partially determined whether persons or streets were listed. Mail delivery was not the motivation for the directories.

Publishers were less reliant on the post office than on their own personnel once the groundwork was laid. This particularly applies to Wise series 2, after they purchased the post office directory and combined this with its official directory in 1900, possibly because their method of compilation was well established.

The term local directories may be a more appropriate description than post office directories.

Reliability

Doubt has been cast upon the accuracy, completeness and comprehensiveness of directories, particularly in earlier editions, because they were:

- compiled hastily
- revised periodically
- restricted in scope
- produced rapidly by non-specialist publishers as an immediate tool for the workaday world
- reliant on too few, or too many, information sources.

They also had difficulty keeping track of an expanding and mobile population. Directories after Watson 1883-1884 were more reliable, but still contained errors.

Common **inaccuracies** included:

- erratic spelling of names
- names and initials being incorrect or reversed
- names differing from one directory to another, or between sections within directories
- householders being placed in the wrong street
- two or more dwellings being listed out of running order
- street sequences being switched from side to side or end to end.

Some errors may be rectified by common sense and complementary evidence. However, error cannot be assumed since town residents often moved from house to house within the same suburb or street.

Completeness

Often completeness was inadequate because:

- of a lack of street numbers everywhere before 1878, and outside the city centre before the 20th Century
- numbers, names of buildings or householders were missing
- unoccupied land and buildings might or might not be listed ("vacant" can refer to either, and "vacant land" does not indicate the magnitude of it)
- it is difficult to match people with places when cross-streets, direction of street survey or a whole block are occasionally omitted.

Comprehensiveness

Problems with comprehensiveness include:

- the time lag behind the population, and the data leakage due to geographical mobility
- the variability in methods of compilation
- an urban bias until the late 19th Century
- the country emphasis of Wise directories thereafter
- the relative neglect of Brisbane occupations in Wise editions
- commercial concentration after 1940
- when residence was a principal concern, only heads of households, or those of some social or economic status, were included. There were disproportionate numbers of males, employers and independent persons of both sexes, compared with female workers, lesser lodgers and live-in servants overall.

It is difficult to assess the extent of these deficiencies.

Application

Directories provide sequential lists of names and addresses for private households, commercial establishments and other institutions. Therefore, they may be an essential tool for:

- information about specific people, places and institutions during a particular period
- a continuous time series of comparable data for examining patterns relating to such subjects
- nominal place-related data when other records are missing
- details relating to any of the areas mentioned when other records are lacking
- information from advertisements and their illustrations, in conjunction with that in newspapers, almanacs and other sources, about the way of life, activities and values of a time and place
- biographical and family details, including occupation, residence and mobility, possibly providing clues to year of arrival and shipping records, as well as year of death

- identification of businesses, institutions and societies, including location and function
- occupational analysis of males and visible females as an indicator of the social, economic and industrial configuration of a street, of a community or respective areas of a town
- class analysis of status groupings derived from occupation analysis of social class
- social and geographical mobility of people and occupational groups across time and place
- identification of individual buildings, structures, sites and inhabitants, their names, locations and functions over time
- historical reconstruction of the social, occupational, residential, commercial and spatial configuration of a street block, suburb, community or town over time.

The following reasons might help explain omissions of names of people if the directory lists householders.

The person:

- did not wish to be listed
- was not the head of the household
- had died prior to the publication of the directory
- was an employee of a business, not the owner under whose name the business would usually be listed
- applied for listing after the publisher's deadline, postponing entry to the following year
- moved elsewhere to live with family, friends, in a boarding house/hotel, in a hospital, in another town or state.

A name may be missing from other sections, particularly occupations and businesses, if a fee was required for listing.

Rod Fisher's article provides helpful ideas to search directories, but it is also worthwhile noting the following:

- The most complete run of post office directories is held in microfiche folders on open access on level 3.
- Electoral rolls can assist in tracing enrolled adults in a household, not just the head of the household.
- Those directories on CD-ROM on level 3 allow for keyword searching.
- Electoral rolls on CD-ROM by QFHS allow searching by street and occupation without a person's name, as well as finding a woman's married name when her first two names are a little uncommon.
- *Ancestry* and *Findmypast* also provide sporadic runs of electoral rolls, but do not facilitate searching without a surname and personal name

Queensland Directories subject list 1868-1949

Subjects	Meyer 1868	Bailliere 1874	Shaw 1876	McNaught 1878-79	Watson etc 1883-87	Hollander 1889-89	1890-91	Weatherill 1892-99	Wise 1889-1925	1926-40	1941-49
Indexes			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Contents			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ to 1922/23	✓ from 1922/23	✓	✓
Subjects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ to 1913/14	✓	✓
Advertisements	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Streets			✓	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ from 1900	✓ & buildings	✓ 1943
Suburbs				✓							
Towns	✓ Post Office			✓		✓					
Trades			✓ gazetteer	✓							
Information											
Advertisements	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
British manufacturers											
Calendar				✓ almanac	✓ 1887	✓	✓	✓ 1892	✓	✓	✓
Duties (fiscal)						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Government	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harbours/ports					✓ 1887	✓	✓	✓			✓
Population						✓	✓	✓			✓
Post & telegraph						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Railways				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Towns (incl preambles)			✓ gazetteer	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
Directories: subject											
Agricultural: see Pastoral								✓			
Commercial/Financial		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ 1897/99	✓ to 1913/14	✓	✓ Comm Bris 12&13
Ecclesiastical			✓ Bris area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Educational			✓ Bris area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Governmental	✓	✓	✓ Bris area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ 1897/99	✓ to 1919/20	✓	✓
Institutions (incl societies)			✓ Bris area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Legal			✓ Bris area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Medical		✓	✓ Bris area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Municipal		✓	✓ Bris area	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Pastoral & Agricultural					✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Pastoral (stations)			✓ Qld	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Telephone					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ to 1942
Vocational (trade/profession)		✓	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓	✓	✓	✓ Bris area
Person (alphabetical)	✓ appendix also	✓ 1	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area & subs 6	✓	✓	✓	✓ Bris area
North Brisbane	✓ 1&2		✓ 3 Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ 4 Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area & subs 6	✓ Bris area & subs 6,7	✓ 7, 8 subs	✓ & subs / Ipswich 1939+	✓ Comm Bris 12&13
South Brisbane	✓ 1&2		✓ 3 Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ 4 Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area & subs 6	✓ Bris area & subs 6,7	✓ 7, 8 subs	✓ 7, 8, 9 subs	✓ Comm Bris 12&13
Other suburbs/local areas	✓ 1&2		✓ 3 Bris	✓ Bris area	✓ 4 Bris area	✓ Bris area	✓ Bris area & subs 6	✓ 5 Petrie Tce 1880	✓ Sandgate 1920/21+	✓ 11	✓ Comm 13
Select areas	✓ 1&2		✓ 3 Bris area								
Country (towns)	✓ 1&2				✓ 3			✓	✓ 10	✓ 10	✓ 10

Need further information?

(07) 3840 7810 | https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/services/ask-librarian

State Library of Queensland

Queensland Government