

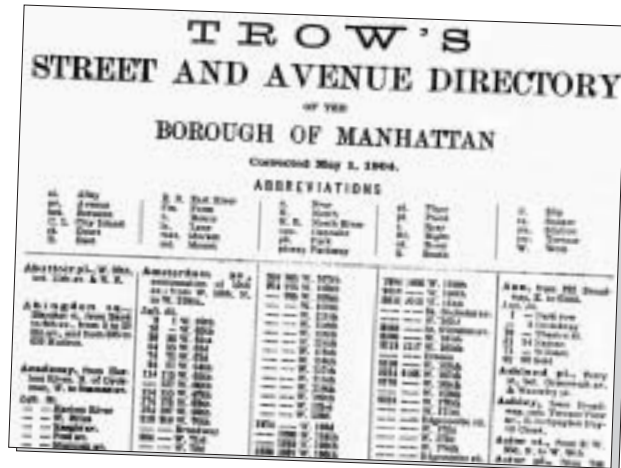
# Road to Nowhere

John M. and Nadine A. Hoenig describe tools for locating an address that no longer exists.

SOMETIMES WE NEED to locate an address but we find ourselves on a road to nowhere — the street no longer exists. Street necrology is a new genealogical term that refers to cataloguing changes in the names of streets.

There are several reasons why this is of interest. First, it is well known that indexes to the federal censuses are filled with errors. If you can't find a relative in an index, then look for another index. If you still can't find your relative, you need to search manually — page-by-page and line-by-line. For small towns, this may be no problem at all.

But, for a large city, this task can be hopeless — unless the search can be narrowed down. The obvious way to do this is to find the relative's address in some other source such as a city directory, or a birth certificate of the relative's child, or in naturalization papers. One then searches the pages of the census corresponding to this street. The search can be hastened if one determines the enumeration district for the street address. But, a long street may traverse several enumeration districts and a small street may not be mentioned in the description of any of the enumeration districts. Thus, we may need to know that Allen Street was nestled between Oak Street and 23rd Street and then find the enumeration district containing Oak and 23rd. Similarly, if you want to find a relative in a state census you'll need to find the enumeration district. And, if you want to find a relative's World War I or World War II draft



*A portion of the street directory from the 1904 edition of Trow's City Directory for Manhattan. The guide describes the location of every street, and indicates which house numbers occur between each pair of cross streets.*



*This building was at 512 West Broadway in the 1920s when John's first cousin (twice removed) had a hardware store there. It's now at 512 LaGuardia Place. The building didn't move — the street name changed.*

registration card, you may need to determine in which district he registered.

A second reason for looking at street name changes is that you may want to visit an ancestral home. John's first-cousin twice-removed owned a hardware store at 512 West Broadway in Manhattan from 1908 up until 1927. The store address was listed as the destination of several other relatives on passenger manifests when they arrived in

America. Thus, we were curious to see if the building still exists. There is still a West Broadway in Manhattan but, according to MapQuest, there is no 512 West Broadway. Instead there is a LaGuardia Place at the location where it appears 512 West Broadway ought to be.

To make a long story short, we visited the site and sketched the building. We then looked at a fire insurance map from the 1920s at the public library and confirmed that the features in the map (number of stories, number of windows, etc.) matched what we saw. Later, a relative showed us photos of the three stores John's cousin had owned and we immediately recognized the store on West Broadway.

A third reason for taking note of street name changes is that you may be able to find old photos at your local library or historical society that show a street where your relative lived, worked, went to school, or worshipped. If that street's name changed over time, you may find the photo but miss the connection.

## Using City Directories and Deed Books

Many city directories have a guide to streets at the very beginning or end of the directory. For a long street, this will tell you what range of house numbers occurred on the street between two cross streets. The information can be compared with a map prepared at a later date to determine if the street name has changed. City directories can be found in local public libraries or can be accessed on microfilm through your local Mormon family history library.

We looked at the *1904 City Directory for Manhattan, New York City*, published by Trow's. The first street listed was Abattoir Place; an area that we presume was rather pungent back then! It didn't seem likely there'd be an abattoir there now so we wondered what happened to the street. We checked MapQuest for the area around West 39th Street and 11th Avenue. The entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel now runs through the area where Abattoir Place was located.

Another way to find a property is to visit the county court house and look at the deed and

mortgage books, and plat maps. These describe every parcel of land in detail and thus should lead you to the address you seek as well as the streets in the vicinity.

### Steve Morse's Website

You might imagine that some people have placed guides to street name changes on the Internet and you'd be right. Thanks to Steve Morse and his colleagues, things have become even easier. At Steve's website [www.stevemorse.org](http://www.stevemorse.org) are compilations of street name changes for 71 cities in the United States. Under a particular city's name you may find a link to a website with name changes (and, sometimes, photos) or you may find a table that Steve and his friends compiled or both.

The lists are not perfect — for example, we didn't find any mention that part of West Broadway became LaGuardia Place or that Abattoir Place no longer exists. But, the lists are certainly useful. And, Steve and his colleagues are eagerly seeking additions and corrections so their compilation can only grow in usefulness.

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### Family Chronicle Feedback

The editors of *Family Chronicle* love to hear from you, the reader. When we attend or exhibit at conventions, we have dozens of people who come up to us and comment on the magazine. Almost all the comments are kind; these are nice to hear but the most useful feedback are critical comments, remarks about specific articles and ideas for future issues. We don't want you to wait until you see us in person. Let us know how we are doing — suggest ideas, ask us questions for You Wanted to Know, tell us about websites that deserve promotion: we really do read all your comments. Send your e-mails to: [feedback@familychronicle.com](mailto:feedback@familychronicle.com)

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