

The Sanborn Maps of New York database is available for use in all B&ECPL locations and for at home use with a valid B&ECPL library card.

What are Sanborn maps? Sanborn fire insurance maps are large scale detailed property maps including building outlines, property boundaries, street addresses, building use, and other information. This database covers hundreds of New York State cities and towns, including over 50 Erie County locations. Use Sanborn maps to locate buildings and neighborhoods, see a neighborhood “as it was,” to study the growth of towns and cities, and to identify the impact of new developments.

What information do the maps give? Location of buildings; building numbers, function, construction materials, size and shape; location of windows and doors; name labels on public buildings; pipelines, tanks, and wells; street names and railroad lines; as well as other information.

Are Erie County locations in the database? Yes, over 50 Erie County locations are represented.

What are some uses for Sanborn maps?

- **Local History** – Sanborn maps help study the make-up, growth, and decline of neighborhoods. They show buildings, street names and numbering, as well as rivers, canals, and railroads. Businesses and public buildings are labeled, which enables researchers to uncover the uses of structures over time. They assist the study of local business and industry history by identifying business locations, names, and type, and by providing detailed layouts of large factories and businesses.
 - *Special Maps* - Maps for larger cities often include special topics. *Examples:* Buffalo includes maps for the grain elevator and the congested districts. NYC includes maps of the dry goods district, warehouses, and others.
 - *Local Data* – Index maps may show population and information on road paving, water facilities, and fire departments.
- **Genealogy** – Genealogists use Sanborn maps to learn details about an ancestor’s home such as the location, building materials, and features. They can find out what an ancestor’s neighborhood was like and learn information about their place of work. The maps label places of worship which can help lead them to record sources.
- **Environmental Research** – Historical uses of property may indicate environmental risk (e.g. dry cleaners, silverware manufacture). Sanborn maps also detail tanks and their contents (e.g. gas, oil, paint).
- **Real Estate** – Research the history of a building/house to help determine historical value of property. Find out if a property was used for a purpose that may indicate environmental risk (see Environmental Research above).
- **Writing** – Maps can help add authentic details to a work.
- **Model Railroading** – Create accurate model cities. Find railroad tracks, stations, and learn what was in their vicinity.
- **Other Uses:** architectural research and design, urban planning and renewal, historic preservation and conservation, classroom projects, archaeology, and collecting.

➤ **Additional information about the history and use of Sanborn maps is located here:**

<http://lib.guides.umd.edu/sanbornmap>

Frequently Asked Questions

Why aren't the maps in color?

Most Sanborn maps were printed in color. The color on the maps indicates building construction materials. In more recent maps, notations on the maps indicate materials used. For earlier maps, the color on the maps is the only way to find out construction materials.

The database's maps were scanned from black and white microfilm. When the maps were put on microfilm, the cost of color film was too expensive.

The city I'm looking for isn't included in the database -or- the area of town I'm looking for isn't on the map.

Sanborn maps often do not record an entire city or town. Surveyors only mapped areas that were built-up and that they deemed valuable.

According to the database, if a city is not listed, it is unlikely that the Sanborn Company created a map for it. A good place to check for maps is with local governments, libraries, and historical institutions for the location you are seeking.

How can I get help reading the maps?

Map Guides

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps Colors and Symbols (Interactive):

<http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/sanborn/Help/SymbolsColors/>

Abbreviations and Map Keys

List of Sanborn Map abbreviations: http://web.mit.edu/thecity/resources/abbreviations_for_sanborn_maps.pdf

Sanborn Map Key: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/about-this-collection/>

Why are there multiple dates or date ranges for the maps?

If a date range is shown and is not followed by an asterisk, the range represents the dates a map maker started and finished the map/maps for a locality. When a date range is followed by an asterisk, the end date is the most recent map correction date.

How do I access paper Sanborn maps?

The Grosvenor Room in the Central Library carries some Sanborn maps in print. See the following online finding aid for the holdings:

https://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/special-collections/guides/Atlases_Buffalo&Erie%20county.pdf

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A union list of Sanborn Maps is located here: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/sanbul.html>.