

# Correcting Place Names in your Genealogy Records

We should use complete and accurate place names where possible. That means, if you know the town and state, you should look up and add the county. There are two important issues that relate to places and future research. One of these issues is to identify the government or church entity that carries the records for the place. The other issue is to know where the place is physically so you can understand the geographic context – that is, what places surround it, or are close to it. Ideally, you want to use the place name as it existed at the time your ancestor lived there, but that can be difficult using present day tools. But the location as it now exists is better than nothing. In addition to Gazeteers available at the Family History Library, BYU and the Family History Centers, there are several tools that can help you with using complete place names. Some are briefly described below:

## PAF's Places Report

This allows you to review the places in your database as a precursor to correcting them.

## PAFInsight/Family Insight – Place Editor

This feature of PAF Insight can greatly ease and speed the updating of Place Names in PAF. It is a commercial product that you have to pay for, but it can be used for free at the Family History Centers. It allows you to correct many misspellings with a single change, and merge groups of misspellings.

## World Place Auditor

WPA is a commercial product that sells for about \$15 and is installed from a CD. It covers the entire world.

## Animap

Shows you how the boundaries of the counties change over time. Includes a US Gazeteer. This is a commercial product you have to buy, but it can be used for free at the Family History Center. A book with similar information that covers only the census years is available, called the Map Guide to the U. S. Federal Censuses: 1790-1920 by Dollarhide.

## NewFamilySearch Standard Place Finder (<http://204.9.231.95/stdfinder/PlaceStandardLookup.jsp>)

This is a test database which is aimed at newFamilySearch but can be used directly through a test site. It is not yet complete, but it has some nice features that make it speedier and more useful in some situations than GNIS.

## USGS/GNIS (<http://geonames.usgs.gov/pls/gnispublic/>)

This is a free online database provided by the US Government. It not only allows the lookup of place names, but allows you then to look at various sorts of maps showing the feature location. It includes all sorts of features, not just populated places, such as rivers, schools, valleys, cemeteries, etc. It can be used to find the county in which a town is located. Also to find a list of many of the cemeteries in a county. It includes many historical places in addition to those that presently exist, but many times doesn't give the exact location for those.

## Global Gazeteer <http://www.fallingrain.com/world/>

This is a free online gazeteer that covers the world. Like most of these place finders, it only identifies places as they exist today, not historically.