

Genealogy Loves a Good Map!

I would stare at maps of Delaware for hours.

- Ken Jennings

A good map can bring those spiritless census, tax and land records to life by placing an ancestor at a particular location at a point in time. Maps can let you know where to look for records, provide hints about family relationships or track family migration through the generations. If you're a genealogist or a salesman in "The Music Man", "ya gotta know the territory".

The Hundreds of Delaware

When you work with records in Delaware before about 1910, you quickly notice that most significant administrative records are organized by "hundred". According to George S. Messersmith's *The Government of Delaware* (1907), "Up to the formation of the constitution of 1897 each county in Delaware was divided, for the purpose of local administration and government, and for the assessing and collecting of taxes, into districts known as "hundreds"" (page 18).

The Delaware Hundred came from German and British forms of government as "a local division of land, the people living in which are supposed to be able to send one hundred men to war in case of need. Each hundred had its officers, was the unit in raising taxes, and had its own courts" (page 19).

This subdivision of a county in Delaware was eventually replaced by the Representative District, but the names of hundreds appear in historical records long after the 1897 constitution and the hundred continues in common usage today. Personally, I live in "Brandywine Hundred" in the northeastern part of the state.

Pomeroy and Beers 1868 Atlas of Delaware

So if maps are an indispensable tool for genealogy and the Delaware hundreds are the most important land division for genealogical research in Delaware, where do you find the best maps of the Delaware Hundreds? Look no further than the Atlas of the State of Delaware produced by the Philadelphia company of Pomeroy and Beers in 1868. Click on the Nanticoke Hundred map at left for a good example.

These are truly luxurious maps, hand colored lithographs, that are incredibly detailed, showing places, landowners, roads, railroads, businesses, and districts within hundreds. The maps were published by Pomeroy and Beers based on surveys completed by D.G Beers in 1868 and engraved by Worley and Bracher of Philadelphia. I've never seen the original atlas, but I

believe there are 37 maps in all with numerous insets for major towns and cities.

The David Rumsey Historical Map Collection

You can find black-and-white versions of the maps, free to download, from several sites, such as the [Delaware Geological Society](#). You can also buy quality color reproductions of the maps from the [Delaware Historical Society](#) or buy high quality images from [Historic Map Works](#).

The best deals on the Internet, however, are found in the [David Rumsey Map Collection of Cartography Associates](#) where you can download, reproduce and transmit images for non-commercial use at no cost! Usage of the maps is governed by a [Creative Commons License](#). In addition to making their work publicly available, they also make use of the latest scanning, image processing and viewing technology to produce and deliver maps in a variety of sizes. You do need to register on the site in order to download the largest images, which I have done for most of the hundreds of maps I work with regularly. Spend some time exploring this site. You never know what you might find and many of the maps are true works of art.

Finding Uncle Rion

As I mentioned, the maps of the Pomeroy and Beers Atlas identify place names and landowners. I often encounter place names in family records that don't exist on maps of today but it's not unusual to find that long forgotten place on an Atlas map.

My fourth great-grandfather was William B Rion (1794-1865). He is found in the 1860 census for Nanticoke Hundred, Sussex County, Delaware in an area served by the St. Johnstown post office. St. Johnstown (or sometimes just 'Johnstown') is one of those places lost in history. [Wikipedia](#) provides the following:

"a stop on the now defunct Queen Anne's Railroad line between Ellendale and Greenwood. After the railroad closed down and the tracks were removed, all property owned by the railroad was returned to its previous landowners and several small towns built around the stops disappeared."

The map earlier in this article is the Pomeroy and Beers Atlas map for Nanticoke Hundred. Studying this map, I find St. Johnstown in the northwest portion of the hundred, in "District 76".

William B Rion died in 1867 and his will was probated in 1868. His eldest son was John S. Rion. If you look closely at the map of Nanticoke Hundred in the uppermost portion at Staytonville, you see a landowner named J.S. Rion. I'm betting this is my fourth great-uncle, living on a property he owned near his father or on a property inherited from him. Pretty cool, huh?

By the way, the Ken Jennings quote comes from the Time Magazine article "[Ten Questions for Ken Jennings](#)".