Business Directories

by Wiley J. Williams, 2006
Additional research provided by Robert C. Kenzer.

Business directories have been published in North Carolina since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Many extant directories provide a valuable contemporary portrait of the business community of the entire state as well as other interesting county and municipal information. One of the earliest examples of a directory of North Carolina businesses is the Commercial Directory, published by J. C. Kayer & Company (Philadelphia) in 1823. This publication, based on the 1820 U.S. census, lists businesses in three of the state's largest towns: New Bern, Fayetteville, and Wilmington. Pre-1900 city directories also exist for Wilmington (1860-61 edition), Asheville (1883), Charlotte (1875), Durham (1887), Greensboro (1879), New Bern (1880), Raleigh (1880), and the Winston-Salem area (including Greensboro, 1879). Typically, these volumes have an alphabetical list of the names and addresses of residents and businesses, a street address directory, and a classified business directory. These directories usually include a numerical list of telephone subscribers.
Between 1867 and 1897, Levi Branson, one of North Carolina's leading publishers and booksellers, compiled and published nine editions of Branson's North Carolina Business Directory. Organized by county, Branson's Directory includes the names of business firms under such headings as blacksmiths, grocers, dry goods stores, and restaurants. The names of all municipal and county officeholders, as well as U.S. officials who held posts such as customs collectors, are also listed. In addition, the volumes include the names of a wide variety of other professionals and institutions in each county, such as schools, attorneys, ministers, physicians, and postmasters. Importantly, the directories also note if businessmen and other community figures were African American.


Additional Resources:
"Explore and compare and contrast the business environment in Wilmington, North Carolina and Charlotte, North Carolina in the early 1900s by exploring the city directories" Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. https://docsouth.unc.edu/classroom/lessonplans/gtts/city_directory.html

Manufacturing Directories in the North Carolina Digital Collections:
http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/search/searchterm/directory%20manufacturing/field/title/mode/all/conn/and/order/nosort/page/1

North Carolina City Directories Collection at DigitalNC.org: http://www.digitalnc.org/collections/city-directories/

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