

Indianapolis Directories Tell A Keen Story

What could a city directory tell us besides an address? By looking a little more closely at the Indianapolis City Directory listings over a forty-something-year time span we see a slice of the life of Lawrence and Elizabeth Keen's family. This part of their story plays out from 1869 through 1911.

- 1869: This is the first Indianapolis listing for the Keens that I find: Lorence Keen, shoemaker, residence 203 S. Alabama.

This is the only time we see the Alabama Street address. Since the Keens arrived in Indianapolis around 1865-67, I will presume this was intended as a temporary residence, until they could afford or find their family home that follows.

- 1870-1889: For the next nineteen years the Keen directory listing is: Keen, Lawrence, boots and shoes, 167 Virginia Ave., res. 175 S. New Jersey.

Lawrence's shoemaker business on Virginia Avenue was a couple of blocks from the Keen home on S. New Jersey St. These addresses continue through our city directory story.

- 1888, Their City – The city directories include all kinds of background other than street addresses. The introduction in the 1888 directory gives a detailed and clear picture of the development of the city. The Keen family was in the midst of a tremendous growth period for Indianapolis and it was reflected in their area of the city. The south side of Indianapolis, Fountain Square, attracted a huge number of German people, many of them starting businesses catering to the needs of immigrants flowing into the city. A shoemaker was surely very busy.
- The 1869 through 1888 directories also provide a snapshot of the maturation of the Keen family. In 1869 John Keen, at age 21, is listed as a clerk at the Spencer House saloon and he boards at 280 E. Market St. He must have moved out on his own soon after the family arrived in Indianapolis. John married Wilhelmina Hilden in 1872 and had two children by 1880. In the 1888 directory John is working at a "pictures and frames" shop at 76 N. Pennsylvania and lives at 702 N. Tennessee.

Further family information in the 1888 directory adds details of other Keen children. Background is there for a total of five of Lawrence and Elizabeth Keen's offspring. They are now all old enough to have a job, therefore, a separate listing in the city directory. Anna, Clara, Fred, George and John are all independent. The two girls, however, still "board" at 175 S. New Jersey with their parents. Clara and Fred are bookbinders at Sentinel Printing Company and George works at a saloon at 684 N. Mississippi.

- 1889 is the year that Lawrence Keen died at his home, 175 S. New Jersey Street, and this is the final city directory where we find him listed.
- The 1908 and 1911 directory listings for the Keen family show the next generation of family life. Frederick Keen is a bookbinder who lives at 539 S. Alabama. There are listings for two of his sons, Albert and Maurice, who are also bookbinders and they board at 539 S. Alabama.

So the story goes on.

These city directories are full of interesting bits of information that can add up to a snapshot of

an individual, a family and their surroundings. They can provide details that help answer family history questions. The Keen family story in Indianapolis gains lots of flavor by using this reference.

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