

World Building for the Real World Resources

Compiled by Bill Cameron

This list is by no means comprehensive. Most of these resources have a U.S.-focus, though analogs for many places world-wide are available.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/

University, college, and local libraries often a collection of these, some in print and many digital.

Interpreting Sanborn Maps

www.historicalinfo.com/fimo-interpret-sanborn-maps/

If you want to get really granular, this article does a deep dive into how to read Sanborn maps.

Special Collections

College and university special collections are often open to the public even if you aren't affiliated with the institution.

Local and regional historical societies usually have libraries and reading rooms. Some are open to the public, some available by appointment. Online help may also be available.

USGS TopoView

ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/

U.S. topographical and geologic maps (in addition to other data types), both contemporary and historical for U.S. states and territories.

Social Security Administration list of most popular names

www.ssa.gov/oact/babynames/

See lists for specific years, or by decade going back to the 1880s. Fun character naming resource.

Inflation Calculator

www.officialdata.org/countries

Provides a general indicator of the value of money over time in more than two dozen currencies. In different eras and countries, goods will have different values in relation to each other, which may or may not track with the overall value of money.

Prices and Wages by Decade

libraryguides.missouri.edu/pricesandwages/home

This resource from the University of Missouri is a carefully organized source for retail prices of goods and services in North America (primarily the U.S.), as well as wages. Some of the data goes back to the 1600s, though it is more detailed and plentiful in recent decades. This is an incredible resource!

Breakfast the Year You Were Born

www.thedailymeal.com/eat/breakfast-price-year-you-were-born-gallery

This long gallery starting in 1937 is U.S.-based, but a great way to see value in context over time.

A search online will bring up a number of similar sites, some as narrowly focused as the cost of a cup of coffee over time to broad overviews of the price of consumer goods and services.

Gold Prices Over Time

www.macrotrends.net/1333/historical-gold-prices-100-year-chart

This website has a wide range of historical price data you can search.

Fashion for Men and Women from the Victorian Era through the 1980s

vintagedancer.com

This website has a wide range of historical price data you can search.

5 Steps to Getting Rights to Lyrics

(Anne R. Allen and Michael Murphy)

annerallen.com/2013/03/so-you-want-to-use-song-lyrics-in-your/

Practical guide to getting necessary permissions.

Further Reading

Crime and Fantasy Books Have More in Common Than You Might Think (Kelly Braffet)

crimereads.com/worldbuilding-crime-and-fantasy-books-have-more-in-common-than-you-might-think/

The Five P's of World Building (Jaye Wells)

<http://jayewells.substack.com/p/the-five-ps-of-world-building>

Jaye offers a lot of great writing insights through her website. This link a great place to start.

Grounds for Murder: Maps and Floor Plans in Mystery Novels (Kristel Autencio)

bookriot.com/2015/09/28/grounds-for-murder-maps-and-floor-plans-in-mystery-novels/

This is Us: The Pandemic and Being Too Specific (Jeff Somers)

wrdeepdives.substack.com/p/this-is-us-the-pandemic-and-being

Using Real People, Places, and Corporations in Your Fiction: How Real Can You Get and Not Be Sued? (Matt Knight)

www.sidebarsaturdays.com/2017/08/05/httpwp-mep7vddb-us/

Practical overview of the legal issues surrounding the use of the really real.

Could I Be Liable for Libel in Fiction? (from the Rights of Writers blog by Mark Fowler)

www.rightsofwriters.com/2010/12/could-i-be-liable-for-libel-in-fiction.html

Blake Morrison on the cost of quoting lyrics

www.theguardian.com/books/2010/may/01/blake-morrison-lyrics-copyright

Insight into what it might take to use song lyrics in your title. (You'll have to convert from British Pounds.)

The Public Domain Review: Guide to Finding Public Domain Works Online

publicdomainreview.org/guide-to-finding-interesting-public-domain-works-online/

Looking for something to quote that you won't have to pay an arm and a leg for? This is a great rabbit hole to fall into.

[illegible]

Sanborn Map Interpretive Key

KEY	
	Fire proof construction. (OR FIRE RESISTIVE CONSTN)
	Adobe building.
	Stone building.
	Concrete, lime, cinder or cement brick.
	Hollow concrete or cement block constn.
	Concrete or reinforced concrete constn.
	Tile building.
	Brick building with frame cornice.
	" " " stone front, " " " frame side, " " " frame partition.
	Brick veneered building.
	Frame building, brick lined.
	" " " metal clad.
	Frame building.
	Iron building.
	Tenant building occupied by various manufacturing or occupancies.
	Frame building covered with asbestos.
	Brick building with brick or metal cornice.
	Fire wall 6 inches above roof.
	Wall without opening and size in inches.
	Wall with openings on floors as designated.
	Opening with single iron or tin clad door.
	" " " double iron " " " doors.
	" " " standard fire doors.
	Openings with wired glass doors.
	Drive or passage way.
	Stable.
	Auto. House or private garage.
	Solid brick with interior walls of C.B. or C.B. and brick mixed.
	Mixed construction of C.B. and brick with one wall of solid brick.
	Mixed construction of C.B. and brick with one wall faced with 4" brick.
	Mixed construction of C.B. and brick throughout.
	Mansard roof.
	Window opening in first story.
	Window openings in second and third stories.
	Window openings in second and fourth stories.
	Windows with wired glass.
	Windows with iron or tin clad shutters.
	Window openings tenth to twenty-second stories.
	Open elevator.
	Frame enclosed elevator.
	Concrete block enclosed elevator with traps.
	Tile enclosed elevator with self closing traps.
	Brick enclosed elev. with wired glass door.
	Iron chimney.
	Brick chimney.
	Ground elevation.
	Vertical steam boiler.
	Gasoline tank.
	Open under.
	Siamese fire dept. connection.
	Single fire dept. connection.
	Automatic fire alarm.
	Independent electric plant.
	Automatic sprinklers.
	Automatic chemical sprinklers.
	Automatic sprinklers in part of building only.
	Not sprinklered.
	Outside vertical pipe on fire escape.
	Fire alarm box.
	Single hydrant.
	Double hydrant.
	Triple hydrant.
	Quadruple hydrant of the High Pressure Fire Service.
	Fire alarm box of the High Pressure Fire Service.
	Water pipes of the High Pressure Fire Service.
	Water pipes and size in inches.
	Water pipes of private supply.
	House numbers shown nearest to buildings are official or actually up on buildings.
	Old house numbers shown furthest from buildings.

Deryn Collier on fudging

twitter.com/deryncollier
deryncollier.com/



Deryn Collier @deryncollier · 38m



Speaking of which, there's always the fudge factor in research for historical fiction. For example:



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My WIP is set in Montreal in the spring of 1947. My research on taxis of that era tells me that taxis did not have radio dispatch until later in the summer of 1947.



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But I need my fictional taxis to have fictional dispatch in order for my story to hang together. And so, my taxis will have radios *snap* the magic of fiction.



About W.H./Bill Cameron

When not tending his chickens, *Crossroad* author W.H. Cameron shapes unruly words into captivating people caught in harrowing situations. As Bill Cameron he writes the critically-acclaimed Skin Kadash mysteries, and his YA mystery *Property of the State* was named one of *Kirkus Reviews* Best of 2016. His stories have appeared in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, *A Beast Without a Name*, Lee Child's *First Thrills*, and more.

Bibliography

Writing as W.H. Cameron

Crossroad

"Hey Nineteen" in *A Beast Without a Name* (anthology)

"Christmas Spirit" *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, Nov/Dec. 2021

Writing as Bill Cameron

Property of the State

County Line

Day One

Chasing Smoke

Lost Dog

Puppy Love Noir (short story collection)

Diaries of Misspent Youth (short story collection)

"The Princess of Felony Flats" in *First Thrills* (anthology)

"Heat Death" in *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*

"Slice of Pie" in *Killer Year* (anthology)

"Coffee, Black" in *Portland Noir* (anthology)

"Sunlight Nocturne" in *Deadly Treats* (anthology)

"The Last Ship" in *West Coast Crime Wave* (anthology)

"A Tall House" in *Lost Children 2: Protectors* (anthology)

"Daisy and the Desperado" in *Murder at the Beach* (anthology)

Learn more at www.bcmystery.net.

Check out the *Crossroad* map collection here:

www.bcmystery.net/books/crossroad-maps/