

HOW TO RESEARCH YOUR HOME HISTORY

HOME HISTORY HOW-TOS

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RESEARCHING ARCHITECTURE

What good is architectural information?: Architectural drawings can reveal a lot about your home, such as specific measurements of rooms, home mechanics and even hidden details you may not be aware of. Additionally, they may provide insight into materials used on your home, floor and electrical plans and even design techniques used to build your house.

Finding the architect: Building permits can be a valuable source of information. If the records have not been discarded, they might be found at a municipal or county agency, such as the building inspection department, the planning commission's office, or the city engineer's office. They will often contain contact information for the architect.

Finding the layout of your home: Architectural drawings can be found in a myriad of places, such as with the current owner, in a storage space, in a library or archives, with the descendants of the original owner, or perhaps even with the family or alma mater of the home's builder or architect.

Historical archiving: The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) was established in 1933. For home historians, this is a good thing, as survey holdings include drawings, photographs and even building histories of selected structures around the U.S. Much of the survey data is permanently on file at the Library of Congress, and provides a database to compare building characteristics. Catalogues based on the HABS collection have been produced for some local municipalities. Historical societies or museums and libraries — in addition to preservation associations and city and state historic commissions — may have information about the HABS project. For more information: <http://www.nps.gov/hdp>



RESEARCHING CONSTRUCTION TECHNIQUES, MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY

Construction materials: Information on materials can be found with the architectural plans, building permits and zoning records. Copies of zoning ordinances and regulations are often available at public libraries or archives. Case files are often available at a municipal or county agency, such as the building inspection department, the planning commission's office or the city engineer's office. If the zoning for the property involved some controversy, make sure to check the local media archives.

Using public utilities: If permits are not available or accessible for some reason, public utility connection dates can help home historians verify construction dates and potential improvements that may have occurred. Utility companies may have access to records and maps showing the approximate times of when gas lines were laid, or electrical lines were put in place, for example.

Household technology: Information on household technology — such as heating and ventilation systems — can be found in architectural plans, building permits and zoning records. Copies of zoning ordinances and regulations are often available at public libraries or archives, while case files are often housed at municipal or county agency, such as the building inspection department, the planning commission's office or the city engineer's office.

The four most important home history resources:

- 1) Deeds and other related property records.
- 2) City directories and telephone books.
- 3) Maps and other related sources.
- 4) Personal histories (including obituaries, etc.) of former owners

RESEARCHING IMPROVEMENTS/PUBLIC RECORDS

Legal description of your property: For home historians, street addresses are often not adequate for researching a property's history. Instead, a legal description is needed. This information can be found in various places, often on tax notices and deeds for transfer of the property. The legal description more precisely identifies real estate parcels, and — if the property includes multiple tenants — a specific part of a building. In some parts of the United States — particularly the East Coast — these descriptions are commonly referred to as “metes and bounds” descriptions. In the deeds, terminology such as “minutes” and “degrees” are used when referring to direction. “Rods,” “links,” and “chains” are used when referring to distance — depending on where in the original 13 colonies the land in question was bought or sold. Additionally, the “metes and bounds” system uses natural land features, such as trees and streams — as well as neighboring land owners — to aid in the descriptions. For areas of the U.S. that don't follow this system, the Federal township-range system is used. The Public Land Act of 1785 established the terminology that is still in use today for much of the remaining part of the country. This includes “sections” (a base unit-containing 640 acres), “ranges,” and “townships.” Additionally, to obtain the above measured legal description, Houstonians must also have the “range lines” and “township lines” established. These lines all run from the “principal meridian” (that measure east and west ranges), and the “base line” (for measuring north and south township lines). Current legal property descriptions can be obtained at the tax assessor's office, public records office, or recorder of deeds. For questions and copies of deeds, consult the office of the recorder of deeds. For copies of federal land records, Houstonians can access these legal descriptions from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). On their Web site, older deeds can be researched and printed out for no cost. Consult them at www.blm.gov.

Legal names: For home historians, knowing the legal name of the homeowner — much like the legal description — is another key piece of information when it comes to utilizing public records for research purposes. Legal names of current owners and current legal property descriptions can be obtained at the tax assessor's office, public records office, or recorder of deeds.

Plat maps: These documents show the shape, size, legal descriptions and ownership of land. The maps — which are typically filed in the county surveyor, engineer or tax assessor's office — provide an accurate representation of a property's boundaries. Researchers can use plot maps, arranged in order, to compare population density of the property, as well as what the surrounding land was being used for. Plat maps often display community upgrades, such as paved streets and utility lines.

Land surveyor's field notes: Field notes can provide a detailed description for home historians in conjunction with plat maps. The notes can vary in detail and accuracy — especially as the years pass. However, they can help fill in details of a property's home history, such as descriptions of general terrain, topography, and flora. In addition, the measurements used by surveyors have evolved through the years between regions. For example, “chains” (66 feet); “links of chains” (100 per chain), and “perches” (units of 16.5 feet, also called “poles” or “rods”) were commonly referred to in early English property surveys. In the U.S. Southwest, Spanish colonial and Mexican national government officials used “varas” (33 inches), “leagues” (4,428 acres each) and “labors” (177 acres each). For U.S. surveyors in the 20th century, nearly all property has been measured in feet and decimals of a foot.

Deeds: These documents prove ownership of property, and are typically filed at a county courthouse or public records office. For home historians, deeds can clearly show a chain of property ownership. The buyer (called a “grantee,” or recipient of the property) and the seller (referred to as a “grantor,” or disposer of the property) are clearly named on deeds. Keep in mind property can be donated, or inherited. In addition, home historians should be sure to check with the local historical society, as some societies have published their own “deed guides.” Among the information home historians can likely find in a deed includes: owner(s) names; owner occupations; places of residence or former residences; dates of property transfers; legal description (at the time the deed was originally produced) and clarification on property-use restrictions and allowances. They may also include birth, marriage or divorce details and death notifications of owners and associated individuals — as well as other details. Different deeds can suit several different purposes, too. For example, deeds of foreclosure may indicate financial missteps; deeds of trust or mortgage may show financial savvy, bankruptcy and sometimes an inventory of assets. Additional research into deeds includes researching into the mortgages of those persons living on each property and their owners. Checking the mortgagor (person taking out the mortgage) and mortgagee (institution or enterprise loaning money) indexes for the names of property owners — as in the previous grantor-grantee indexes — can yield details about the properties that might otherwise remain unknown, such as property-cost considerations; terms of mortgage; and other related details.

Mechanical liens: For construction workers, mechanical liens help to ensure payment. These documents become records of the court when an owner has denied or delayed pay for work that has been completed. The lien identifies both the person/company filing it and the owner, as well as the money amount in dispute. A lien remains on record until payment has been secured.

Encumbrance: When the ownership of a property is not clear, this is often referred to as an encumbrance. Examples of types of encumbrances include leases, estates that are not settled, quitclaim deeds and owner failure to pay property taxes. Title insurance and abstract companies acquire land histories to guarantee or support land ownership claims, which help to reveal encumbrances.

Tax records: Real estate taxes assessed by local and state governments are kept on file, and contain a wide range of information for Houstonians. While tax records are normally open to the public, tax assessor field notes — usually containing detailed building description — are often not. Tax notices usually include the name of the owner, the assessment rate, and the assessed property value, as well as the address of the property trustee. Details on improvements, new construction, remodeling, and additions can also be gleaned. Look for tax records in your county revenue department, tax appraiser's office, county tax office, office of the ordinary, or judge of probate. Other historical tax records may be kept in the city clerk's office, city hall or your state's historical archive.

U.S. tax records: At various times, the U.S. maintained excellent tax-related records for inhabitants within each local community. Starting in 1913, the modern federal income tax system went into practice with the passage of the 16th amendment. Prior to 1913, the government made several attempts at uniform tax codes.

Direct Tax — 1798: Starting in 1798, when the government was still very young, a direct tax (also called the window tax) was levied on U.S. citizens. For large portions of the country, these records are now unavailable because they have been destroyed, but several states have complete records including New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. These include information for home historians on the individuals who owned the properties. If you suspect the property you're researching dates from this time (1798 or earlier), searching these records on microfilm is a must. Information available may include the property owners; acreage; dimensions of the buildings; number of stories and windows; and listings of the adjoining neighbors.

Internal Revenue Tax Lists — 1862-1872: This tax law came into action during the Civil War in 1862 (with the passage of the Revenue Tax Act). The reason was very apparent: The federal government needed revenue to fund the war effort and taxed those persons or businesses in the states under federal control. These records don't include the areas of the south in rebellion. The tax was levied on three different classes.

Class A: Income based; included those persons earning more than \$600 per year

Class B: License based; included peddlers, retailers, taverns, etc.

Class C: Ad-valorem based; included personal property owned, such as gold watches, etc.

Tax records during this period included the taxpayer and stated the above class listing, as well as the amount of tax paid to the federal government. This law was repealed by 1872 and not taken up again until 1913. These records have been microfilmed and are available at the National Archives and now on www.ancestry.com. All of the above tax lists are federal records, and don't include the wealth of tax records at the state and local levels. Some of these records include personal property tax, triennial and tax-assessment docket books and records. All of the records are available through your locality. Please check your courthouse or historical society for their collections. They usually include the taxpayer, any occupational information and taxes owed and paid on both their real and personal property.

Building and occupancy permits: While many rural areas may not have them, these permits— when available — can be helpful. Home historians can likely find them at a municipal or county agency, such as the building inspection department, the planning commission's office or the city engineer's office. With them, researchers can reveal clues such as determining outbuildings that were built; identifying home dimensions; discovering materials used in construction; and damage repair information.

Zoning records: Copies of zoning ordinances and regulations are often available at public libraries or archives. Case files can be found at a municipal or county agency, such as the building inspection department, the planning commission's office, or the city engineer's office.

Using public utilities: If permits are not available or accessible for some reason, public utility connection dates can help home historians to verify construction dates and potential improvements that may have occurred. Utility companies may have access to records and maps showing approximate times of when gas lines were laid, or electrical lines were put in place, for example.

Court records: Wills, probate proceedings, and lawsuits all have a place in the home historians's checklist of sources. Of course, such records are typically filed under the jurisdiction of the court in which it was heard. Cases settled against a property owner should be referred to in a property deed. If the owner won the case, or it was settled out of court or dismissed, check the local media. Wills, in conjunction with probate cases, contain the most assorted, and — in some cases, contradictory — information. Both records may provide names of locations of heirs and partial or complete inventories of both real property and other assets. When doing estate-related research, it is helpful to know whether the individual being researched died testate (with a will) or intestate (without a will). Other details home historians would find helpful include records of guardianship, records of estate inventories, lists of heirs, and bonds (taken out by the heirs) and recorded on each testator. Additional historical and genealogical research into court records can yield records of bankruptcy proceedings. These are federal court records and are only available at the National Archives or their regional facilities. Bankruptcy records date from the 1790s and contain great details on persons or families living at a certain location at a specific time.

Where to find census records: All of the census records listed in this PDF are part of the National Archives collection, and all of the census schedules are available at the National Archives in Washington D.C. on microfilm. The LDS Church in Salt Lake City, UT, owns and duplicates all of these same films. Individual state archives and libraries generally have their own state records. Furthermore, the National Archives (12 branches not including Washington, D.C.) have their regional census records.

Federal census records: Since 1790, the U.S. government has taken a population census of inhabitants – which has been completed every 10 years to present. Due to confidentiality laws, information regarding the federal census is restricted for 72 years. Therefore, the last available census researchers can currently access is the 1930 census. (Data from the 1940 census will be available in 2012.) Starting in 1850, the census recorded each member of households. Prior to that date, only the head of household was recorded. Of particular interest to home historians would be the census records of 1850, 1860, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 that recorded whether the families owned their property. In 1870 — in larger cities — compare exact street addresses (to check against city directories) to match the house you're researching with the earlier occupants from generations long passed.

In addition to getting information such as household resident listings, the census records may also yield occupational and vitals statistics (i.e. ages, marital status, gender, and race descriptions for each resident). One drawback to the federal census occurred in 1921. In that year, the 1890 census was mostly destroyed by a large fire in Washington, D.C. Only about one percent of this original census survived. Thankfully,

what did survive was information on veterans of the U.S. Civil War (or their widows) in 1890. These records give a unique glimpse into these families from more than 100 years ago.

To tap into the vast resource is relatively easy to accomplish. The National Archives in Washington, D.C. and all of the branches throughout the U.S. have copies of all the census microfilm from 1790-1930 readily available to researchers to use. One great sourcebook to guide you through the research process from their facility is the "Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives," which can be purchased from the archives for a modest fee. Many of these records have also become readily available online. If you can't visit the National Archives directly, you can still make full use of their records from your own home at <http://www.archives.gov>. Most public libraries in the U.S. have access to Heritage Quest Online (<http://www.heritagequestonline.com>). It is a paid subscription database filled with research information that can be accessed often with just your library card number. Please consult your own public institution to inquire whether they subscribe to this great source of genealogical research.

Non-population census records: From 1810-1820 and again from 1850-1880, the U.S. recorded special schedules of census data that was non-population related. The following records/schedules work hand-in-hand with each other. They come from the same locations and were done at the same exact times as the regular federal census. Citizens would have filled out the non-population schedules if applicable. They comprised the following schedules:

* **M1792 — Manufacturing schedules in the 1810 Population Census Schedules of New York:** The 1810 Manufacturing Census is practically non-available because it was destroyed – except for the New York records (M1792). Most of the remaining schedules are with the regular census. A special U.S. marshal appointed by the federal government took the manufacturing schedules. Available through The National Archives. (<http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/census/nonpopulation/new-york.html>)

* **M279 — Records of the 1820 Census of Manufacturers (National Archives):** In this census, there were 14 different questions, including the type of industry; type and quantity of the product produced yearly; cost of raw materials; type of labor and machinery; and value of capital invested in the business. Beginning in 1850-1880, the census bureau had enumerator's record information about manufacturing, mining, fisheries, and every mercantile, commercial, and trading operation with an annual gross income of \$500. Many of the same questions asked from the previous census were all asked, including names of the company or owners, and information dealing with labor and costs to work. Many valuable details are available to Houstorians from these volumes of research. Available through The National Archives. (<http://www.archives.gov/genealogy/census/nonpopulation/new-york.html>)

* **Agricultural schedules — 1850-1880:** Beginning in 1850, census enumerator's began to collect various pieces of information about the farms across the U.S., specifically those that met a certain minimum cash value. From 1850-1860, farms with \$100 or greater in production value were evaluated. From 1870-1880, farms with a value of \$500 or greater production were evaluated. These schedules document the farming value for 12 months preceding the census. Included in this schedule is the name of the farmer, acreage and usage of the farmland. Also listed is the value of farming implements, produce, livestock, and machinery. Questions on the produce and crops were likewise examined. All these records are available on microfilm at the National Archives or any regional office and add a wealth of information for Houstorians.

* **Mortality schedules — 1850-1880:** Beginning in 1850, running through 1880 every 10 years, the census bureau kept statistics on deaths. Recorded are names of persons who died in the last calendar year from the date of the census return. Listings include the names; ages; cause of death; birthplace; occupation; and attending physician. These are another valuable source of genealogical and historical information if any of the former owners died in that calendar year. These records can be accessed via the National Archives on microfilm or on www.ancestry.com for a paid subscription.

* **Slave schedules — 1850-1860:** These schedules are available only for 1850s and 1860s. With the Civil War and the end of slavery, these schedules ceased to exist. They are predominantly available for the southern states, but also have a connection with border states such as Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas, Maryland, and Delaware. Included in these schedules are the names of the slave owner and the ages, gender, and race of each slave (black, or mulatto) within each jurisdiction. These records are available on microfilm from the National Archives and on www.ancestry.com by payment.

* **Veteran's schedules – 1890:** This was a special census schedule from the nearly destroyed 1890 federal census. This was intended for Civil War veterans (or their spouses if the soldier was dead) who served in the Civil War for the North. Confederate soldiers were not to be recorded on these returns, but most census enumerators didn't follow instructions and listed them anyway — later crossing out the entries. Many of these entries however are still legible. The states beginning M-Z are available, while those at the beginning of the alphabet have been lost. These records, like the previous schedules, are available at the National Archives and on www.ancestry.com.

State census records: State census records are almost as important as the federal census to historians and genealogists. Their random availability makes them an often under-utilized source of information. State census records not only can stand in as substitutes for missing federal census records (most notably the 1890 census that was destroyed by fire in 1921), but also as a valuable resource stand-alone. Not every state had their own census, but many recorded information available to researchers. An excellent resource to determine whether your state had a local census can be found in the following reference book: Lainhart, Ann S. "State Census Records." Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1992.

Vital statistics: Once you have done your preliminary research on your property and the owners who lived during each period of ownership, you may wish to obtain vital statistics on those owners to add a new dimension to your research.

Q. Was the former owner well known?

Q. Was the building or structure used for anything besides a dwelling?

Generally, these consist of the following types of records: birth, marriage, divorce, and death records. Consult each state in which the event occurred to determine the availability of records within that location. One great source of historical and genealogical research to obtain vital statistics nationwide is the following Web site: www.vitalchek.com

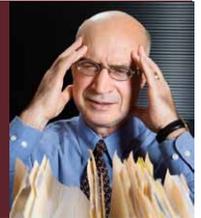
Other government agencies: Fire departments have log books that document fires; post office records show the date a postal route started, as well as the condition of nearby streets and roads — records probably best located by connecting with a local librarian, architect, historian, county clerk or an older postal employee.

Freedom of Information Act: Sometimes, when requesting certain records from the U.S. federal government, you may be required to fill out an FOIA form. This may be necessary when trying to access certain information, such as building permit data, records from the social security administration, etc. These forms are normally very simple and inexpensive. Alternatively, you can use automated forms for submitting requests to either federal agencies (www.rcfp.org/foialetter) state agencies (www.splc.org/foialetter). There may be a short waiting period when sending for information.

Keep your home history in order:

A Home History Book can help you stay organized and allows for ready access to all your hard work.

What's the point of compiling all of this information if you can't find it?



RESEARCHING OWNER HISTORY

In death, there is a story: Cemetery records can help paint an individual's life picture, as can newspaper obituaries. Also: Ask local places of worship to which the family may have belonged. For example, the Family History Centers overseen by the Mormons have detailed genealogical information on their members (www.familysearch.org).

City and rural directories: While not always complete, these yesteryear publications are often found at libraries and archives, and can be invaluable for home history research. They can include a wide range of data, including names, addresses, occupations and even race for most adult residents of a city or community. In addition, property occupants and owners may be indicated. Furthermore, directories usually recorded widows and their former husbands by name. Keep in mind that some directories charged to be listed – which may limit their effectiveness — and often, single adult women living at home were often not included (unless they worked). Also, the city directories will often include advertisements that highlight local businesses. Telephone directories, published more recently, can also provide clues. Rural home historians may have more luck searching farmer directories, which included information such as acreage owned, what kind of farm it was and even what kind of automobile the family may have driven.

Ask long-time residents: Home historians should consult older residents, neighbors and local historians. If you bring photos and information about your home, it may help to jog their memories as well. Also: If you know the names of previous homeowners/residents, mention them.

Meet with a genealogist: It never hurts to ask or look for some help. Offer to take them out for a coffee or lunch, and get to know other genealogists by attending local genealogical meetings. Most local genealogical and historical societies hold monthly meetings on various topics, usually free to visitors. Additionally, there are several national organizations that hold genealogical conferences each year. Some of these include:

- 1) Brigham Young University — Provo, Utah
- 2) National Genealogical Society — Nationwide locations
- 3) Federation of Genealogical Societies — Nationwide locations
- 4) Ohio Genealogical Society — Various locations in Ohio
- 5) Southern California Genealogical Society — Burbank, Calif.
- 6) Institute of Genealogical and Historical Research — Birmingham, Ala.
- 7) New England Regional Genealogical Conference — Various locations in New England

As a student of history, you can take classes (for a modest fee) from nationally recognized professional genealogists and historians who have years of experience and knowledge in the areas that you will need research help. The more you learn of the history of your community, the better prepared you will be in completing your home's unfolding story.

Utilize all available resources: Museums, libraries, universities, state historic preservation offices, neighborhood associations, historical societies... you get the picture. There is a lot of information out there. You just need to go find it.

Published histories: City and county histories, available at most libraries, can provide a valuable backdrop for home historians. Historical

events can be put in context for a particular community, and migration, social and economic patterns can be more clearly understood. Also: ask for street or house files. Sometimes, local libraries and historical societies compile information on particular sections, streets and even houses.

Newspapers: Although considered to be a secondary source of records, newspapers are still an invaluable part of any research project. Online archives for newspapers dating back as far as 1753 in about a dozen countries (including the United States, Canada and the U.K.) can be found at: <http://www.newspaperarchive.com>; by paid subscription; in colleges and universities; at historical societies; and at state and local libraries. Like published histories, news articles can give context to any community. They contain advertisements of all kinds, including real estate and home furnishings that may have been popular in the past. Clues regarding home prices can be gleaned, and — if a previous owner of your home was famous (or infamous) — they will likely make an appearance in the news. Additionally, some of the newspaper records also include vital record announcements, such as birth, marriage, and death listings; obituaries; voting and public offices held; organizations and clubs; jurors lists; civil, criminal, and other court proceedings; military matters; and finally gossip. Utilizing newspapers will be well worth your efforts.

Community organizations and business records: Specialized publications, such as club membership lists, are valuable sources — as are records of social organizations, such as country clubs or the local chamber of commerce. Social registers and blue books — also referred to as “elite lists” — include names of family members and their club affiliations. Niche publications, such as booklets that monitor festivities or community/school/church/club celebrations can also fill out a home history.

Diaries and journals: Home historians, like you, may have already compiled some of the research for you in the form of household account books, letters or diaries. Check with local historical societies and museums to see if they have donor files on hand, and identify if particular individuals have made interesting donations. If the former owner was noteworthy, check the National Union Catalogue of Manuscript Collections.

Company records: Former owners who worked for larger companies or in a university setting may have left clues in the form of archival material documenting a person’s work life.

Mortgage the past: Mortgage companies sometimes have old records on buildings they were involved with. Remember to check your local property indexes for the mortgage information on your property research.

RESEARCHING PROPERTY AND COMMUNITY

Find local resources: Check with your local historical society, museum, library, or historical commission to see if they have information on researching homes in your specific area.

Make a map: A good way for home historians to record information about their home’s surrounding area is to prepare a rough map showing the location of the house in relation to roads and other dominant features, such as large trees or notable buildings. Use a tape measure to get the dimensions of your home and its distance from the street and nearby intersections. If the house is in a rural area, measure the distance to an intersection or local landmark by noting the mileage in a car or with an odometer. These measurements will later be invaluable in interpreting maps, legal records and photographs as you get more in-depth into your home history.

What’s in a name? Names of neighborhoods may give away clues regarding your home. Area names such as “Knob Hill” or “Chinatown” may help trace the origins of your home more efficiently.

Absorb your surroundings: Look around your home, and use all your senses to help you discover clues about your home history. For example, when you open your windows, do particular odors come to the forefront, such as the smells associated with a factory or perhaps a bakery? What sorts of activities are people doing outside on a normal day? All can be clues to help you stitch together a more complete story.

Was you home ever moved? To make way for development, such as highways, houses are occasionally moved. Gathering information, such as noticing if your basement appears to be newer than the rest of your house, or simply asking your neighbors, can help home historians trace a history more accurately. Also: Sanborn Fire Insurance maps can yield clues as well by showing you if the property has always included your home.

Paint a demographics picture: Who lives in your neighborhood? What kind of restaurants do people frequent? Is it a mixed-used neighborhood (housing commercial and residential populations)? This “person-on-the-street” information can contribute well to your home history.

Detect metals? Sometimes, using a metal detector can literally help to unearth clues about your property and the outlying area.

Community makeup: Notice the natural movement of your home’s community, such as where people work, shop, worship, etc. — as well as the transportation routes they use to move about, such as on trains, buses or subways, or along rivers or via freeways. After identifying and researching the outlying landscapes, home historians are much more able to fully realize a home’s true history.

Check with documented sources: A wide range of resources is available to home historians, including special collections, magazines, databases and indexes — normally found in local libraries.

Subdivision history: Look at the history of your subdivision, if applicable. In some cases, after the plat or map of your subdivision was

recorded, newspapers may have published real estate advertisements highlighting the property. Also, look for brochures and pamphlets published by the developer.

Published histories: City and county histories, available at most libraries, can provide a valuable backdrop for home historians. Historical events can be put in context for a particular community, and migration, social and economic patterns can be more clearly understood. Also: ask for street or house files. Sometimes, local libraries and historical societies compile information on particular sections, streets and even houses.

RESEARCHING THE HOME EXTERIOR

Facelifts: Try to notice alterations, such as mixed materials or material scarring that may indicate structural deletions. Finding this evidence can be challenging for home historians – especially considering modern construction practices that make telling the difference between an original material and a substitute difficult.

Get familiar with architectural and construction techniques: Depending upon when your home was built, certain trends in both architecture and construction from the time period when your home was built will likely provide lots of clues for home historians. For example, what kind of roof do you have? To determine styles, consult house stylebooks at libraries. One book in particular, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, by Virginia & Lee McAlester, is considered the go-to source for determining home styles.

House plan books: These types of books have been around since the mid 1800s. They contain sketches or photos of homes, complete with floor plans – which can be invaluable from a home history perspective. Homeowners would simply send away for blueprints, and give them to their builders to construct. Libraries and some larger bookstores may have copies of the original books. Newspapers — and perhaps even some lumber companies, who produced the wood needed for homes — may also have the information. For example, from 1908 to 1940, Sears, Roebuck & Company marketed and sold approximately 100,000 homes by catalog.

Note the property's function: Is your residence part of a larger living complex, or is it a stand-alone house or property? Was the home provided by a large employer – such as a college – or was it built independently?

Public records can be specific:

Effectively locating public records comes down to having accurate information about what you're searching for. Often, public records will list an individual's name exactly as they normally use it. However, sometimes a seldom-utilized initial letter or name can complicate the process. If names have been altered by life events, such as marriage or divorce, the person/s may not appear in the document or index you are searching.

RESEARCHING THE HOME INTERIOR

Facelifts: Try to notice alterations, such as mixed materials or material scarring that may indicate structural deletions. Finding this evidence can be challenging for home historians – especially considering modern construction practices that make telling the difference between an original material and a substitute very difficult.

Notice the subtleties: Aside from more obvious modifications – such as new room additions – focus on more minor clues, such as signs of wallpaper replacement. This kind of detail may help indicate a room's previous use.

Get familiar with interior design trends relating to your home's beginnings: Home historians should try to research interior design, using books and older publications, such as magazines and newspaper advertisements, if applicable. For example, advertisements may provide insight into a variety of interior-design issues, ranging from costs of materials and goods to appliances, heating and cooling systems.

Line things up: To get a full picture of a home history, take a bird's eye view of how your home's rooms are laid out. Are the dominant line features curving, horizontal, or are they vertical? For example, many 18th- and 19th-century rooms emphasize vertical design by utilizing high ceilings, towering windows and oversized doors, whereas other styles may have more rounded features.

House plan books: These types of books have been around since the mid 1800s. They contain sketches or photos of homes, complete with floor plans – which can be invaluable from a home history perspective. Homeowners would simply send away for blueprints, and give them to their builders to construct. Libraries and some larger bookstores may have copies of the original books. Newspapers — and perhaps even some lumber companies, who produced the wood needed for homes — may also have the information. For example, from 1908 to 1940, Sears, Roebuck & Company marketed and sold approximately 100,000 homes by catalog.

Get in there and get dirty: Get up close and personal with your walls – which may give clues to the timeframes of the building. Home historians may have differing moldings in the same room for example, which may help to indicate modifications. Clues can be everywhere. For example, holes in walls may lead to observations about locations of paintings or lighting; unusual window shapes and sizes may help to clarify the locations of decorative windows.

Look at things in a different light: Original paint colors and wallpaper can be difficult to ascertain for home historians, as rooms can transform shades on a fairly regular basis. Often, outer fabrics – and sometimes even the wall itself – must be removed or disturbed to make these discoveries. However, sometimes – when walls are examined during various times of day in differing lighting conditions — different clues can become apparent.

Look to the pros: While you may be able to discover a lot on your own, paint chip removal should be done with extreme caution by Home historians – not only in terms of home damage, but also information accuracy. Light, aging, pollution, glazes – all can alter the look of the paint. In many cases, professional conservators are needed for final evaluation.

Clues at your feet: Floors and floor coverings are often pages in the life story of your home. Details about furniture locations and room uses can be revealed to home historians by carefully examining floors for things like marks, burns, scars, and water damage. However, sanding, polishing and waxing floors – or replacing older carpet – can destroy or greatly compromise the accuracy of this information.

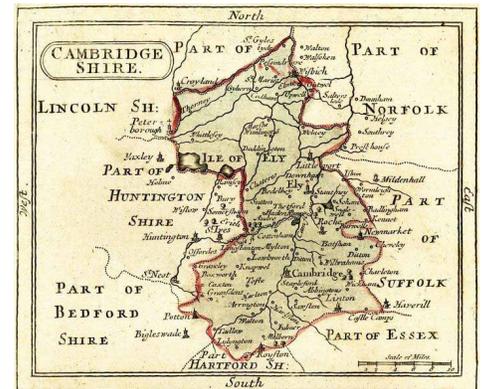
Apply your knowledge of appliances: Appliance styles – particularly in bathrooms, utility rooms and kitchens – can really help home historians gather valuable insight. These rooms are nearly always the first locations in a house to receive the latest and greatest in technology. Leftover clues, such as capped gas lines, electrical outlets, switches and lighting fixtures can also tell a tale.

Using public utilities: If permits are not available or accessible for some reason, public utility connection dates can help home historians to verify construction dates and potential improvements that may have occurred. Utility companies may have access to records and maps showing approximate times of when gas lines were laid, or electrical lines were put in place, for example.

RESEARCHING VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Maps: Most areas in the U.S. have been mapped in some way. For home historians, the most familiar maps are those utilized with legal descriptions of property, subdivision maps, plat plans or individual plot maps.

Fire insurance maps: Maps created by the Sanborn Map Company date from 1867 and consist of a series of maps representing commercial, industrial, and residential areas of the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Founded by David A. Sanborn — who was a surveyor by occupation – they were produced to help insurance companies determine risk factors associated with structures in many communities. More than 12,000 communities are well represented in this huge collection, including cities and towns, and villages. Sanborn's maps cover 1867 to 1961, with most dating after 1876. Many cities were updated regularly, as numerous editions are often available. Sanborn maps provided detailed information such as the height of buildings and the number of stories; whether the structure had a basement; even the locations of doors and windows in buildings. Additionally, they provide information on the construction of the building. The Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. houses the entire collection of Sanborn maps, and many local universities, library, and historical societies dotted throughout the U.S. have their own local collection



County atlases: County atlases date from the mid- to late-18th century (circa 1850) and became increasingly popular by the early 20th century. Many are published and available for historians and genealogists to research. Often, landowners are listed by name, and associated with their locations on each map. Some atlases give information pertaining to businesses and occupations of the property owners, while others record the acreage of each property. There were several map artists who covered the U.S. very nicely. These included (Frederick) F. W. Beers and Henry Bridgens of Philadelphia, Penn. The Map and Geography reading room of the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. has the largest collection of historical atlases. Please consult your local historical or genealogical society for maps in your area as another source of information.

Plat maps: These documents show the shape, size, legal descriptions and ownership of land. The maps — which are typically filed in the county surveyor, engineer or tax assessor's office — provide an accurate representation of a property's boundaries for those seeking a home history. Researchers can use plot maps, arranged in order, to compare population density of the property, as well as what the surrounding land was being used for. Plat maps often display community upgrades, such as paved streets and utility lines.

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) maps: These topographical documents are invaluable for rural property home historians, as they show individual buildings. Because they are updated on a relatively regular basis, changes can be documented fairly easily. Home historians can purchase these maps at regional repositories or from state geological survey offices.

Other useful maps: To help fill in the details of your home history, you may need to think outside the box when it comes to other maps. Utilize transportation company maps (such as subway, train or bus maps) to help estimate commuting routes of former home occupants. Additionally, community celebrations and festivals may produce extra promotional mapping, produced in an effort to showcase the event/s in your area.

Architectural plans: Architectural renderings can reveal a comprehensive picture of your home, such as room measurements, home mechanics and potentially even information on secret rooms or passageways. They may improve your understanding regarding a variety of topics related to your home, such as what construction materials and design techniques were used during the building of the residence. The architectural drawings themselves can be found in myriad places, such as with the current owner, in a library or archives, with the descendants of the original owner, or perhaps with the family or Alma mater of the home's builder or architect. Additionally, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), which was established in 1933, may open a few research doors. For home historians, this is a good thing, as survey holdings include drawings, photographs and even building histories of selected structures around the U.S. Much of the survey data is permanently on file at the Library of Congress, and provides a database to compare building characteristics. Catalogues based on the HABS collection have been produced for some local municipalities. Historical societies or museums and libraries — in addition to preservation associations and city and state historic commissions — may have information about the HABS project. For more information: <http://www.nps.gov/hdp>

Building permits: For home historians searching for information on their home's architect, building permits can be a wealth of information. If they still exist, these records will likely be found at a municipal or county agency, such as the building inspection department, the planning commission's office, or the city engineer's office.

Photographs: As professional historian Nancy Green has said, "There are two kinds of old homeowners. Those who have vintage photos of their home, and those who want vintage photos of their home." Family photo albums, newspaper offices, real estate offices, professional photography studios and private and public collections — such as in a museum or college — are all excellent places to search for photo documentation of your home. Your house may even be featured on an historical postcard — a social trend that was quite popular in the early days of the camera. Home historians should research this in their local library or historical society. Aerial photographs produced by government agencies — a wonderful and entertaining resource — may be available for a cost. More information on aerial maps may be available through the state geological survey or soil conservation service.

Road docket maps: When properties were surveyed and new roads were planned leading from one public road to another, it became necessary to petition the local court to have a new survey performed on a roadway being considered. Enterprising businessmen and residents (generally) petitioned the court to survey the entire length of the proposed road. Documents attached to the petition included rough drawings of the area in question, as well as names of the landowners along the path of the new road. Also included were businesses located along the project's path, such as mills, taverns, and other public structures.

Draft registration maps: Between 1917 and 1918, as the U.S. became actively engaged in World War I, approximately 24 million men (both aliens and native) born between 1873 and 1900 were required to fill out draft registration cards. Larger cities (such as New York) needed maps to help with boundary changes to determine individual draft board registration information. The maps were an integral part of organizing the boundaries of larger cities. For cities such as New York, these maps are available at the New York Public Library in Manhattan. Additionally, they can also be found in the archives of local newspapers of the time. Consult your local area libraries for this wonderful map resource.

Election maps: Of genealogical interest were maps used for election information. In larger cities such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, it became necessary to have maps drawn detailing the voting boundaries. These maps are a relatively untapped resource that is often ideal in determining the whereabouts of people in urban areas, and work hand-in-hand with city directories to find individuals in question. For example, beginning in 1884, registered voters in New York City were listed in a supplemental record guide by street address and broken down into election and assembly districts. The corresponding maps show the boundaries of the districts by borough, making it relatively easy to find family members in election records

Census maps: These maps were created and drawn by the U.S. Census Bureau (part of RG30 – National Archives). Used primarily as a guide to locate the corresponding EDs (enumeration districts) on the population census to find individuals, census maps are very detailed as they contain the boundaries for each census district to aid genealogists and historians in finding someone not very easily located in the indexes if their street address is known. Consult the National Archives in Washington, D.C. or one of the several regional offices to find these maps.

Gazetteers: Although not maps, they are another great source of genealogical and historical information for your home history. Gazetteers work closely with maps to describe information about the communities that are portrayed on various maps. Gazetteers give details about villages and small towns such as their population, local businesses, and even railroads within each community. Most major libraries have gazetteers for their state. Consult your local library or historical society.

Panoramic maps: During the late 19th and early 20th century, panoramic maps were a popular cartographic form in the U.S. These maps — also known as "bird's eye views" maps — were hand-drawn representations of cities and towns. They were typically not drawn to scale, as they show streets, individual businesses and homes, and terrain features. Panoramic maps symbolize accurate representations of many communities from around the country. Some of the more respected panoramic artists included:

* Albert Ruger (1829-1899)

* Thaddeus M. Fowler (1842-1922)

* Oakley H. Bailey (1843-1947)

* Lucian R. Berleigh (1853-1923)

* Henry Wellge (1850-1917)

These artists plied their trade for more than 50 years and many maps are available to researchers. Many libraries and historical centers have individual collections of these panoramic artists. The Library of Congress has scanned and made available most of the panoramic maps online. Simply search their Web site for the community of interest at www.loc.gov.

HOW TO RESEARCH YOUR HOME HISTORY

HELPFUL HOME HISTORIANS HINTS

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WHY RESEARCH YOUR HOME HISTORY?

Increases property value: According to The National Trust for Historic Preservation, preservation is a vital economic development tool. Historic preservation helps maintain – and in many cases increases – property values. The Home History Book™ archival journal was specifically designed to enable this preservation process. Using your Home History Book today can benefit you financially tomorrow.

Heritage tourism benefits: Visitors spend billions of dollars visiting historic sites and cultural attractions, according to The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). According to the ACHP, visitors to these places stay longer and spend more money than other kinds of tourists. A Home History Book is a living time capsule focused on sharing cultural and historic facts with its users and highlighting your property's worth as an historic and cultural landmark.

Characters and lifestyles: Learn about people of differing time periods in their various roles, and how they relate to your own story.

Community connection: Discover the history of your city and community and how the areas were settled.

Evolution of a building's purpose: Research into your home's history can also help uncover clues that aid future construction considerations for your property and identifying unique construction features.

Lend your community a helping hand: Help your local municipality to participate in surveys and conduct inventories of buildings in the area, possibly for historical recognition with organizations such as the National Register of Historic Places.

Expert status as a Houstonian: Gather enough information, and you can provide a valuable history lesson in the form of a tour, book, blog, podcast, school project, Web site, magazine article, or donation of museum artifacts — the possibilities are numerous.

Inspire historical awareness: A compilation of historical data can inspire change and preservation in a community.

Protect the environment: Documentation of the landscape is crucial to owners interested in protecting property by donating a scenic easement to a preservation or conservation group. And of course – the more people know about a home, the more they are likely to take care of it.



TOP TIPS TO HELP DISCOVER YOUR HOME HISTORY

The four most important home history resources:

- 1) Deeds and other related property records.
- 2) City directories and telephone books.
- 3) Maps and other related sources.
- 4) Personal histories (including obituaries, etc.) of former owners

Keep your home history in order: A Home History Book can help you stay organized and allows for ready access to all your hard work. What's the point of compiling all of this information if you can't find it?

Public records can be specific: Effectively locating public records comes down to having accurate information about what you're searching for. Often, public records will list an individual's name exactly as they normally use it. However, sometimes a seldom-utilized initial letter or name can complicate the process. If names have been altered by life events, such as marriage or divorce, the person/s may not appear in the document or index you are searching.

Make the grade: Home historians should consult universities and colleges to see if they offer classes on historic preservation that they can sign up to learn more information. Also consult libraries, historical societies or museums to see if anyone offers a home history class for beginners, or something akin to it.

THE HOME HISTORIAN SUPPLY LIST

Notebook/laptop computer: To keep track of everything, of course.

Tape measure: Try to have one on-hand at all times. Whether it comes to creating a map for your home, or measuring a room – accuracy is of paramount importance.

Camera: A picture is often worth a few thousand words.

Recording device: When conducting interviews, it is helpful to have a device on hand — whether it is a tape recorder or something more sophisticated, such as a digital recorder — that will allow you to record (with permission) the people you speak to along the way.

Large folder: During your research adventures, you'll likely run across a slew of loose papers/documents that need a home. Eventually, many of these documents can be showcased in your Home History Book, but in the meantime, a folder will do.

Magnifying glass: Tiny print — common in the types of documents you will likely be examining, such as maps or government documents — can strain the eyes.

Tracing paper: For those times when you can't copy some of the truly historic and fragile documents, or perhaps they are too large.

Pencil: Oftentimes, libraries and historical archives will not let you use a pen on the premises if the documents they house are too fragile or old.

Stapler: Keep the loose stuff organized.

Flashlight: The home historians sometimes has to follow the research trail to dark nooks and crannies in a home to dig up elusive information.

Sharp knife: Need a sample of wallpaper, or paint? This can help.

Mirror: If you are trying to explore hard-to-see areas, such as under an appliance or behind a wall – mirrors can be invaluable.

EFFECTIVE STORAGE/ARCHIVING TECHNIQUES FOR YOUR FRAGILE/PRECIOUS DOCUMENTS

Caring for Your Collections: For information regarding the preserving of documents and objects of historic value, contact professional conservators through your local museum or archives. Also, check out the “Caring for Your Collections” page at the Library of Congress Web site at: www.loc.gov/preserv/careothr.html

How to care for photographs: www.loc.gov/preserv/care/photo.html

How to care for and handle books such as the Home History Book: www.loc.gov/preserv/care/books.html

How to dress leather: www.loc.gov/preserv/care/leather.html

How to effectively preserve newspapers: www.loc.gov/preserv/care/newspap.html

How to photocopy historical documents: www.loc.gov/preserv/care/photocopy.html

How to care for and handle delicate historical papers: www.loc.gov/preserv/care/paper.html

Treat your home like a piece of valuable history:

General guidelines on how to care for your home are contained in a document entitled *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Buildings*. Home historians can obtain this report online at: www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide Even more specific information can be found utilizing a series from the National Park Service called the Technical Preservation Briefs, which touch on everything from cleaning delicate materials to painting historic interiors. www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm