



Start at home:

- The best source about your home is the building itself. Look at the separate parts of the building -- roof, walls, chimneys, doors, windows and foundation. Note what materials they are made of and how the different parts are joined to one another. Try to distinguish original materials from later additions.
- Look at the style of the house -- inside and outside. Style is a clue -- but not proof -- of the age of a building. In some parts of the country, building styles stay popular longer than in others. Keep careful notes and take pictures.

Recorded deeds:

- Go to the county courthouse, or wherever deed records are kept.
- Using the deed records, you can create a chronological list of all of the owners of a piece of property.
- Ask for the index to deeds by buyer.
- Start with the deed to the present owner.
- Note the seller's name and the legal description of the property. Then use the index to find the seller's deed to the same piece of property and note whom the seller bought it from.
- Work your way back through the deeds to the original owner, make a copy of each deed, and keep track of the page and volume numbers.
- A sharp increase in the value of the property could mean a building was added to it.

Other public records:

- If you find gaps in the deed records, look at other public records.
- Sometimes property passes from one owner to another through a mortgage or a will and these documents will probably be wherever the deeds are kept.
- Mortgage records often contain detailed descriptions of buildings.



- Will and probate records may list one or more of the previous owners. You can examine the records filed under their names to see if there are any mentions of the property.
- Local tax records may reveal the dates of additions and improvements to property by a change in the value, and maps of property made by surveyors can show a tool shed or a well that no longer exists.
- Be sure to make photocopies of all records you think will be helpful.

The library:

- Go to the local history section of your public library or historical society to learn more about the people who lived in your home.
- Ask for help finding indexes to town and county histories, manuscripts and other materials about local history.
- City directories often list people's occupations as well as addresses and can help establish the dates that a person lived at an address.
- Federal and state census records can contain information about households.

Maps:

- City and county maps may show your building with the owner's or resident's name written beside it.
- Old maps often show the location of roads and other landmarks that no longer exist.
- Insurance maps, especially those produced by the Sanborn Map Co., contain much information about individual structures, including materials from which they were built.

Pictures:

- Your local library or historical society may have old photos of your building. Postcards can also be helpful.
- Many towns are included in nineteenth-century lithographs catalogued by the Library of Congress and present a remarkably accurate view of every building that existed in a town at the time the lithographs were created.
- Make sure you take a few photographs of your home for the project.

Talk to people:

- Try to track down former residents or their children. They may be able to help you date changes or tell you stories about their lives in your home.
- Neighbors can be helpful if they have lived in the neighborhood for a long time.
- Ask neighbors or relatives if they have any family pictures that might show the building in the background.

Putting it all together:

- By now, you will have a stack of written notes, photocopies of documents and maps and photographs. These are like the pieces of a puzzle.



- Use them to create a timeline of your home's past and write a narrative scrapbook that weaves all your research together.
- Place a copy of your history in your local historical society or library.

Keeping up with the history:

- If your building is new, use some of the steps outlined above to find out what was on the property before your house was built and how the area has changed over time.
- Take a photo of your home and write about your experiences living in it: You will be making history for your family and community.



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