

CHECK IT OUT: BUILDINGS CHECKLIST

The #1 Rule of Architectural Investigations: lay the proper foundation. What you do in the beginning will greatly affect the final product of your research.

Create a research plan and take a methodical approach designed to home in on the key facts. Use our list as a guide, and adapt it to your needs.

Get Familiar

- Learn the Local History
Get context. Read newspapers from the construction year. What were the big issues?
- Do Home Work
Scrutinize house details. Record all clues. Additions? Artifacts? Construction? Quirks?

Get it in writing

- Chain of Title Research
From first owner to you. For online help, go to [Property Search](http://www.pbs.org/historydetectives/techniques/property.html)
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- Tax Assessment Rolls
Watch for changes in value, indicating new construction/additions. Usually county level.
- Building Permits
Construction details for all new buildings, and additions. City/county planning and zoning.
- Contractor (Mechanic) Liens
Contains the contractor(s), detailed work description, cost. County or district court.

Get the support

- Fire Insurance Maps/Rate Booklets
Sanborn maps of industrial areas; booklets for address, owner. Library or online.

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- Architect & Appraiser Records
Office blueprint copies; appraisals with photos, materials. Historical societies, et al.
- Plats (lot drawings) and Maps
See original plats for drawings; city planners for maps and aerials.
- Consider the overall condition of the work. Does condition correlate to the purported age and history?
- Photographs
Interior and exterior. Ask historical societies, former owners, libraries, and county appraiser.
- County Histories and Atlases
May include photos, drawings; often city plats. Library, historical societies.
- Newspapers
Need construction/addition dates. May be fruitless or very productive. Local library.
- Old City Directories
Biannual, owner's occupation. Pinpoints construction date. Library, historical societies.
- Site Files, Historical
Files on historic homes, may include photos, clippings, and inventories. Historical societies.

Get personal

Add color and depth to your research. Learn who called your house their home. What were they like? Where did they come from? What were their jobs? Families or single? What became of them?

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- Oral Histories
Talk with neighbors, previous owners. Have your list of questions; record for transcription.
- Estate Records
Use to reconstruct contents, lifestyle; also activities for sale of property. District Court.
- Personal Papers, Manuscripts
Letters, journals, for clues to construction, furnishings. Library, archive, repository.
- Occupation
Are there business records? Accounts? Newspaper articles. Union memberships?
- Vital Statistics
Birth, marriage and death records, with county clerk. Also cemetery, church records.
- Census Records
State or national. Gives names, ages, relationships, work, more. Library and online.