

## Guide to Researching Your Historic Home

**Identify the era in which the structure was built.** Consult architectural books to discern the core era - even among a century or two of renovations and additions—by examining the silhouette of the house and its layout, as well as the style of the windows, doors, and other features. A mansard roof, for example, may be of the Second Empire style of the late 19th-century, while a hip roof might indicate a Queen Anne house built a decade later. But keep in mind that while looking at visible features reveals a lot, there may be a hidden chapter to the story. Many a contractor has been surprised to uncover an old wall, a few stair steps, or some other vestige during a renovation. A tour of the neighborhood to scope out similar homes can suggest the original blueprint lying within altered walls.

**Examine the details.** Some details that help rough-date a house include nails, paint colors, and molding and muntin profiles. Before the 20th century, all of these had styles particular to certain eras. (The manufacture of building materials became fairly standardized by the late 19th century.) Professionals can help date elements of a house by examining a cross section of a paint chip. If a room had 10 layers of paint, for example, but a door casing only had the last eight, then the casing probably appeared around the same time as the third layer of paint on the walls. If the hardware is from the days of mass production—from the Victorian era on—old catalogs become a great resource. When all the available clues are taken into consideration, the possible construction date of a house ideally falls into a 10- or 20-year window: That's about as good as most of us can do. After looking over a Greek Revival house, John Milnes Baker, a Katonah, N. Y., architect and the author of *American House Styles: A Concise Guide*, pointed out that the authentic Greek Revival style meant a post-1820 construction. Noting the wood gutters built into the eaves—which didn't show up till 1840 or later—and the materials used in the frame, Baker deduces that the house went up around 1850.

**Research the Records.** Visit the local courthouse. They will have access to the official lot number of your house. When it comes to land and properties, most official record-keeping is done using a completely different system than the addresses you're familiar with (especially since addresses and street names change over time). In older areas, the property grid/lot system itself may have changed over time. The local, state, or county land offices or local historical society should be able to find the official grid/lot number (or the equivalent) associated with your house. This will make the rest of your research go much more smoothly.

**Deed Research.** Build a chain of title from the Recorder's Office. To begin you will need the legal description of your property. The legal description is different from the address and includes references to a section, township and range. Deed research can be time consuming but can yield a wealth of information. In addition to the owners' names and dates of sale, deeds can include information on the sales price, as well as birth, death, marriage and divorce records, household contents and other tangible records, liens and mortgages.

**Look up local census data.** Census records can tell you more about the lives of previous owners, like the number of children in the house, cost of the home, whether the home had a radio, and more.

**Get a copy of the original building permit.** Building permits usually contain treasure troves of information including the house's original dimensions, construction dates, and cost as well as the names of the architect, contractors, and/or original owners. Check the county courthouse for a copy of the permit. Note that while there may be a small fee for their services (somebody has to dust off those old archives occasionally), it is well worth the price for the invaluable information contained in those documents.

**Obtain a copy of your property's abstract.** This is a document that records all deeds or legal transactions associated with your property. This will give you the scoop on all your home's previous owners. You may have been given a copy of the abstract when you first purchased the home; otherwise, back to the county courthouse or print this out and bring it with you as a checklist! Review the history of the purchase and selling price. Sometimes a dramatic increase in the selling price over a short period of time usually means a building or room was added or had a large renovation. Check building permits which list type of structure, dates of construction, details, and owner. Visit your county courthouse to

look at the deed registry. The registry is usually found in the clerk and recorder's office. Ask for the registry of deeds for your particular property. This information is indexed by a lot and block number in a city, and a section, township and range for rural property.

**Pay a visit to your local zoning or planning agency.** Find the office that issues building permits, assesses property taxes, or records home sales. They should have public records pertaining to your house. Often an older house will pass from one owner to another through a will or other transference, and may not be recorded on the deed. You might want to look at surveyor maps to see if anything had been added or demolished. One of the only two things in life we can be assured of is taxes, so a good place to start looking might be at the assessor's office in your jurisdiction. The assessor keeps records of the taxable value of the home, and there may be old appraisals on file that describe the house in great detail. You can also check old city directories (reverse phone books that list the homes by address), county histories, vital statistics, and census records.

**Research the history of your neighborhood.** There may be a great deal more information available about your neighborhood than about your house, and this information may provide tremendous insights into your home's history.

**Compile all of your information to create a chronological picture of your house.** Show how and when it was built, when various parts were added or demolished, and what natural events may have made changes to the house.

## Resources:

**Clermont County Auditor**, real property transfers and conveyances. Online property searches by address and owner.

101 E Main St #1, Batavia, OH 45103  
(513) 732-7150  
[www.clermontauditor.org](http://www.clermontauditor.org)

**Clermont County Recorder**, deeds, easements, plats

101 Main St.  
Batavia, Ohio 45103-2958  
513-732-7236  
<http://recorder.clermontcountyohio.gov>

**Sanborn maps**, named for the firm in Pelham, New York, that created them, provide excellent descriptions of size, layout, and materials for houses in more densely populated areas (the maps were used by insurance companies). They are on file with historical societies or available through the Sanborn company, which still exists and may yield a variety of information including building materials, number and placement of windows, even whether the house was wallpapered.

The Sanborn Map Company Inc.  
Colorado Springs, CO  
877-368-9702  
[sanbornmap.com](http://sanbornmap.com)

**American House Styles** by John Baker Milnes. Publisher WW Norton & Company, New York, 1994

**Clermont County Genealogical Society**, a comprehensive site to assist those researching their family history in Clermont County, Ohio offering birth, marriage, census, cemeteries, and death records.

P.O. Box 394. Batavia, Ohio 45103  
Voice Mail 513-723-3423  
[www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohclecgs/](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohclecgs/)

# Goshen Township Historical Society House History Submission Form

Property History for address: \_\_\_\_\_

Submitted by: Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## 1. BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE LAND AND/OR BUILDING

- a. Tax Parcel Number:
- b. Legal Description: (from deed or Assessor's records)
- c. Historic Inventory Designation: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. If yes, Inventory Number \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Assessor's Records Information: Date Built: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Remodeled: \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Other Notes and Information:
- f. Previous Owners: (Include names and dates of ownership)
- g. Title Report or Title Company Records List: (Note: Grantor sells, Grantee buys).
  
- h. Chain of Title:
  - i. Name/Date Instrument (Mortgage) Value
  - ii. Repeat with additional owner names

## 2. PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN YOUR HOUSE

## 3. ARCHITECTURAL STYLE OF YOUR HOUSE.

- a. What is the general style?
- b. What is the method of construction?
- c. Was there an architect?
  - i. If yes, who was it?
- d. Has the house received additions or renovations?
  - i. Date(s):
  - ii. Description:
  
- e. Does the house or building resemble nearby?
- f. Do neighbors/previous owners or their families have information?

## 4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: