

CONDUCTING HISTORICAL RESEARCH ON A RESIDENCE IN SALEM, OREGON

All research begins with the property and the history of its ownership. The initial goal in your research project is to establish the chain of ownership of the property. Once you have established this chain, locating resources containing information about the history of the home and those who lived in it becomes easier.

To begin your property research, you should have the following information available:

- a. Name of the Addition to the town plat
- b. Lot and block number of the property
- c. Tax number of the property

For example, the house at 1658 Court Street NE is in Chamberlins Addition, Lot 3 and Part of Lot 4, Tax Lot 80960-030.

YOUR FIRST RESOURCES

County Assessor's Office: The Marion County Assessor's Office in Salem (or the Polk County Assessor's Office in Dallas if your house is located in West Salem) can provide you with the basic information listed above (a,b,c). You can also consult the file the Assessor's office keeps on each property. There often is useful additional information in this file, including a photograph and a possible date of construction. However, be cautious about the listed construction date as these are not always accurate and any structure built prior to 1900 is automatically dated 1900 in the file.

Title Companies: Gaining access to a title company's records of transactions on a property will save much time in determining the chain of ownership since 1900. Depending on the company and your relationship with them, there may be a charge; start with the company that you dealt with in purchasing the property.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Once you've established the chain of ownership, you are ready to proceed to research your property in earnest.

County Deed Vault: Located at the Court House, this deed vault contains public records telling the sales price for a given property each time it was sold. Using the chain of ownership you developed, you can quickly look up those transactions in the deed records and possibly discover, for instance, that a property that was selling for \$200-\$300 suddenly begins selling for \$1750 or \$2000. This may mean that what was a vacant lot now contains a house, and is a good basis for arriving at an approximate date of construction. The deeds can reveal other helpful information as well.

Also in the vault are the city plat books which include maps and dates of the Additions to the original plan as they were added to the city. Most of Salem's surviving residential architecture is located in one of the Additions. Knowing the history of the Addition is often a valuable background for unraveling the history of a particular house in that Addition.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: Available at the Salem Public Library, these are worth looking at as you focus on the context of the property you are researching. These maps show quite detailed plans of all structures, including outbuildings, within a given neighborhood. The maps were issued and updated at various times, so be sure you are consulting an early or late enough map to include your property. Sanborn maps help you see how the house stood relative to other houses nearby and might provide clues to subsequent changes in the house; i.e., the current porch may differ from the one outlined in the Sanborn which suggests a later remodeling. You may even find that your house was moved from its original location.

City Directories: Also available at the Salem Public Library, these directories are an essential tool once you know the names of the property's owners. If you know that John Jones owned the property at a certain time, the City Directory for that year will verify if he actually lived there and his occupation. It may tell you Mr. Jones' business address in addition to his residence, so you can begin to sense how he moved

about town. Beginning in 1932, the City Directories become even more helpful as they now contain a "reverse index" whereby you can locate an address and see who lived there. Before 1932, it is necessary to have the name of the individual to use the City Directory effectively.

Biographical Index: Located at the Oregon State Library, this resource indexes information on Salemites of the past, both prominent folks as well as some not so prominent. The index may direct you to his obituary and other newspaper or book accounts of his and/or his family. Following up the obituary reference is very important. You may learn when and from where the person came to Oregon, whom he married and the names of his children, where he worked, organizations he belonged to, etc.

SPECIALIZED RESOURCES

Once you know more about your person, more specialized research sources may occur to you. If there was an association with Willamette University, Gatke's *Chronicles of Willamette* may include mention of him or her. If your person was active in a particular church, that church may have books or other resources on its history that may prove enlightening. The same might be true of benevolent and fraternal organizations of which he was a member, such as the Elks, Eagles, Masons, Shriners, Odd Fellows, etc.

The Oregon Historical Society in Portland has an extensive collection of biographical information that includes books, scrapbooks, card files, and census data about pioneers and other important personages involved in the development of the Pacific Northwest. OHS also has many maps, related graphics, and photographs concerning early Oregon and its growth. Additionally, they have back issues of *Oregon Historical Quarterly* which contain indexed articles concerning the history of the northwest, as well as copies of local newspapers on microfilm. Their pamphlet collection, designated in the card catalogue by "PAM" at the top of the call number, includes neighborhood histories, real estate brochures, and many interesting photos. Of course, the open stacks contain many books and publications relating to Pacific Northwest history; the main catalogue is located to the right of the Reference Desk.

The Oregon State Archives in Salem are the archives for Oregon records and documents. Many surviving tax rolls from County Assessor's Offices are in the Archives. Listings are by year and many are alphabetically arranged. By comparing year to year, it is possible to see if the property was taxed for improvements.

If you know who owned the property at the time of World War I, it might prove beneficial to check the loan file of the Military Department in Salem. This file lists the veterans loans; there may be information about the house listed on the records and photographs are often included.

The Oregon State University Library in Corvallis has an extensive collection of Oregon history books. They also have a microfilm file of various resource materials including older newspapers.

DOCUMENTARY RESOURCES

Houses and Homes: Exploring Their History, 1987, American Association of State and Local History, Nashville, Tennessee. This is a general research guide.

House Detective: A Guide to Researching Birmingham Buildings, 1988, Birmingham, Alabama Historical Society. Although geared to the Birmingham area, this is an excellent example of the methods all house researchers can use.

"Getting to Know Your House," Elise Vider, *Historic Preservation*, March-April 1982.

STYLE REVIEW

Classical Revival

- Low-pitched gable roof
- Regularity, symmetry
- Simple wall treatment (usually white)
- Columns and cornerboards resembling pilasters
- Frieze board under eaves
- Pedimented gable, doorways

Gothic Revival

- Steep-pitched gables
- Pointed arch windows or doors
- Window tracery
- Gingerbread bargeboards

Rural Vernacular

- Simple rectangular block plan (often L or T-shaped)
- Simple horizontal siding
- Gable roof
- Simple cornerboards
- Double-hung sash windows (sometimes with cornice moldings)

Italianate

- Segmental arches (sometimes linked by continuous moldings)
- Brackets under eaves
- Paneled frieze boards
- Bay windows
- Roof often low-pitched, hipped

Queen Anne

- Irregularity, asymmetry, multiple roofs
- Variety of wall materials and windows
- Small, stained glass lights surrounding main sash light
- Turrets, balconies
- Porches, prominent chimneys

Eastlake (Stick Style)

- Steep-pitched gable roof
- Vertical orientation of boards, overall vertical emphasis
- Ornamentation on gable

French Second Empire

- Mansard roof
- Pedimented dormer windows

Square Box

Box shape
Hipped roof
Columned porch

Spanish or Mission Revival

Tile roof
Stucco walls
Undecorated window openings
Arches

Bungalow

Gabled roof with wide overhang which shelters porch
OR
Two or more low-pitched, wide gables of different sizes
and altitude facing front
Shed roof dormers
Porches with heavy columns (often resting on stone piers)
Exposed rafters
Prominent chimneys (often of rough stone)