Researching the Story of Your House

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In partnership with the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation

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Consider your “why”

- Something to pass along to family?
- Something to pass along to future homeowners or tenants?
- Help to document your neighborhood’s history

Understanding your “why” may help you figure out what you do with the information you find.

- A scrapbook
- A collection of documents on a USB stick
- A timeline
- An article
Former owners / occupants

Start with you! Purchase date and price, remodelings, special events. Identify pictures of the house’s exterior and interior. Keep track in hard copy or digitally.

Who owned or lived in the house before you, back to who built it and who owned the land before that.

- Abstract of the house: document that lists all previous owners (Dane County Title Co., or genealogist can try to locate)
- Madison City Directories: listings by address as well as by name (1858-1923 are online, 1858-current hard copy available at Central Library)
- Dane County Register of Deeds Office--Real Estate Records (search online and print via Tapestry--fees apply)
Former owners/occupants cont’d

- Obituaries can help you learn more about past owners/occupants. To obtain death dates and obituary dates, check:
  - Ancestry-Library Edition - available in the library
  - HeritageQuest - available in the library or at home
  - Search computer records in person at Dane Co. Register of Deeds (call 267-8810 to make an appointment)
  - Forest Hill Cemetery records: [https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/find-a-park/cemetery/search.cfm](https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/find-a-park/cemetery/search.cfm)
  - Resurrection Cemetery records (these and others available through Find-a-Grave: [https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/343777/resurrection-cemetery](https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/343777/resurrection-cemetery))
  - Newspapers Index available through LinkCat for obituaries published in Wisconsin State Journal ~1960-date
Former owners/occupants cont’d

● To read/print obituaries:
  ○ Microfilm of Wisconsin State Journal (2nd floor, Central Library)
  ○ Newspaper Archive for Wisconsin newspapers (available for Madison Public Library cardholders from home with your library card number):
    https://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/research/databases, connect to Newspaper Archive
  ○ More historical Wisconsin newspapers: https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wisconsinnewspapers

● Census Records: every ten years, through 1940
  ○ Check Ancestry or HeritageQuest (Madison Public Library or Wisconsin Historical Society)
For more recent owners or occupants, reach out!

- Oral history / “house history” interviews
- Photos they have in their collection
- Descendants’ memories
- Neighbors’ memories
History of the structure

Madison history, neighborhood history, subdivision history

- David Mollenhoff’s book, Stuart Levitan’s book
- Neighborhood Walking Tour pamphlets
- “Custer Cards” at Wisconsin Historical Society

House architectural styles

- Schweitzer & Davis, *American’s Favorite Homes: Mail Order Catalogues as a Guide to Popular Early 20th Century Houses*
Architecture and History Inventory: www.wisconsinhistory.org/ahi/

Record highlight: 805-809 Spaight St
History of the structure

Identify the legal description:

*Ex: Fair Oaks Subdivision, Block 16, Lot 9*

And parcel number:

*Ex: 251-0710-053-0109-0*

- Check your tax bill or assessment notice for this information
- City of Madison or Dane County Assessor’s website
Madison Assessor’s search tool: www.cityofmadison.com/assessor/property/
Dane County Assessor’s parcel search tool: https://accessdane.countyofdane.com/
History of the structure

Dane County Plat Maps - land ownership in rural areas

- MPL has a sizeable reference collection of WI county plat maps
- Check your local library if outside of Madison
- Wisconsin Statewide Parcel Map online: [https://maps.sco.wisc.edu/Parcels/](https://maps.sco.wisc.edu/Parcels/)

Sanborn Insurance Maps - outline drawings of building(s) on a piece of property, so over time you can compare and see changes

- Some on microfilm at Central Library
- Microfilm and hard copy at Wisconsin Historical Society
- Online at Library of Congress
Library of Congress Sanborn Maps:
https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/?fa=location:madison
History of the structure

Subdivision Maps - when rural land is divided into building lots

- Dane County Register of Deeds, Real Estate Division, City-County Building Room 110

Tax Rolls - info about land your house or building sits on, and in what municipality it was in (always City of Madison, or different township or village)

- Historical rolls on microfilm at Wisconsin Historical Society, 4th Floor

Building Permits - some records back to 1920s, not required until later

- Madison Building Inspection Unit, MMB lower level
History of the structure

Older Assessment Records

- Madison Assessor’s office, City-County Building Room 107. Office staff can request the “assessor’s field notes” from storage (couple of days’ delay). Copies may be obtained for $.25 / copy.
Other library resources

Clipping file at Central Library

- Architects, Architecture
- Historic Houses, Sites
- Houses--Parade of Homes

Local History Reading Room at Central Library

- Neighborhood history books
- Cemetery record books
- High School yearbooks (in storage, ask at desk)
Some Neighborhood Associations have History Committees
Historic Districts

National Register
Historic Districts

Nomination papers
Historic Districts

https://npgallery.nps.gov/nrhp
Historic Districts

Local Historic Districts (5)
- Mansion Hill
- Third Lake Ridge

Note: here’s the link to the Wikipedia article that an attendee referred to: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Register_of_Historic_Places_listings_in_Madison,Wisconsin
Follow up with us!

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