

# Your Old House:

Discovering when your house was built and the people who also called it "home."

So, you're wondering just how to get started finding out about your home's history? This information sheet will provide you with the places in which to find documentation to complete a house history. Make sure that you have the exact property address and your permanent parcel number handy. You can get the permanent parcel number from your deed, by calling the County Auditor at 216-443-7092 or at <http://auditor.cuyahogacounty.us/rep/>. It is also helpful to find your property's original parcel or lot number--this can be found on your deed, current permanent parcel maps and historic plat maps, or by calling the City's Historic Preservation Planner, 216-291-4885.

**It is highly recommended that you call the places listed below prior to setting out to do research. Many keep unusual hours, and several are closed on the weekends.**

## ***Cleveland Heights City Hall*** ***40 Severance Circle***

(216) 291-4878

### Building Permits

City Hall is a great starting point. Original Building Permits are available for many homes built after 1913. These dated permits give the names of the owner, builder, and architect, if one was involved. Additional structural information is included, however, they do not include floor plans. In order to obtain this information, contact the city's Historic Preservation Planner at 216-291-4885. Information may also be given for permanent parcel number, original development name, and original lot number.

### Maps

The Planning Department has plat maps from 1898, 1912, 1914, 1920 and 1941 available for reference. These maps have original parcel numbers and show the "footprint" of all buildings, so you can see if your house had been constructed at any of the above given dates.

***Cuyahoga County Archives,***  
***2905 Franklin Avenue, Ohio City*** (216) 443-7250  
*(appointment needed; closed Tuesdays)*

### Maps

The County Archives are a wealth of information, if you ask the right questions. Ask to be taken to the room at the southwest corner of the building and look at the "big maps." They are well organized and Cleveland Heights maps have the City's name clearly labeled on the spine. There is a map index on the first page of each of the volumes. These maps show the various owners of the property and when they acquired the property. This will give you a list of people who have owned the property, and perhaps lived in the house. Note: It is helpful to know your property's original lot/parcel number when

looking at these maps.

### Tax Records

Another way to pinpoint the date of your home's construction is to review tax records, which are listed by the owner's name. Once you have a list of owners, you can look their names up in the tax records. Your property's value would have jumped dramatically in the year after your home was constructed.

### City Directories

These are the equivalent of today's phone books. However, in addition to the person's name and address, his or her occupation was also listed. So once you get the names and dates from the map, start looking those names up in the City Directory. Cross check to be sure that these property owners actually lived at your house and what exactly they did for a living.

(This can be fascinating: a chauffeur may have had a small house but a very large garage; a bricklayer would have constructed a small house, but made of brick; etc. Once you find out what these people did, some of the idiosyncrasies of your house may begin to become clear!)

The number of City Directories here is limited, but other research facilities have paper copies or microfilm copies of these books. After 1930, the "reverse look-up" portion of City Directories allows you to look up your address and see who lived there at the time.

### Photos on Building Cards

These are tax assessor's cards and often have a 1950s-era photo of your house on them. Ask for the Building Cards for your house (you must have the address and the permanent parcel number). These help to see what your house looked like before windows or siding materials were changed. They're a great guide if you'd like to restore your home to its original appearance. They also let you know building materials and dimensions so that you can see what portions of your house were added later.

## ***Cleveland Public Library***

***325 Superior Avenue NE***

[www.cpl.org](http://www.cpl.org)

(216) 623-2800

### Photo Archive

Cleveland Public Library has a wealth of information. The Photo Archive has a whole box of photos for Cleveland Heights, however, you must wade through them in hopes of finding a photo of your house. (Warning: odds are very slim!) If you don't find a photo of your house, the time was well spent--you'll love seeing all the old photos of our community!

### Necrology Index

Once you've discovered the names of the property owners, you can find out more about them by looking through the library's Necrology Index (obituary index) online through *Cleveland Public Library* ([www.cpl.org](http://www.cpl.org)) search "necrology," or directly by going to this CPL website:

<http://dxsrv4.cpl.org/WebZ/Authorize?sessionid=0&next=/html/obit.html&dbchoice=1:dbname=necr&bad=html/authofail.html&style=noframe>

Post-1975 obituaries are found in the Cleveland News Index: <http://www.catalog.cpl.org/CLENIX>.

### Maps

Go to the Library's map room and look around. Most important to look at are plat maps and Sanborn maps, which are on microfilm. These fire insurance maps show a footprint of the building much like the plat maps available at City Hall. They are also available through CPL's online databases in the history/geography section, though are a bit difficult to navigate.

Sanborn maps are also available online at The Ohio Online Library Information Network [http://www.oplin.org/access2.php?Id=67-67\\$msgs](http://www.oplin.org/access2.php?Id=67-67$msgs). First you will need to enter your local library card number, then click "research databases" at the left side of the screen, then click the "S" to find the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps database. Once you get into the Sanborn database, enter a street name and follow from there. This database is a bit clumsy and requires a lot of trial and error.

### Misc.

The library has old issues of the *Plain Dealer* on microfilm. There is also a newspaper clipping file which is arranged by heading. These are best for overall history of an area, rather than of a specific property. You might also like to look at their selection of old books and periodicals containing house plans, construction and decorating tips, as well as old architectural magazines, old Society magazines, and Sears Roebuck catalogs from the early 1900s and beyond. If there is an original architect found for your home, the Fine Arts Division keeps architect files.

See their website for *A Checklist for Property Research in Cleveland & Cuyahoga County*: [http://cpl.org/ASSETS/B3FBCB99D5EF4EF49B817694D0018E78/PROPERTY\\_RESEARCH.pdf](http://cpl.org/ASSETS/B3FBCB99D5EF4EF49B817694D0018E78/PROPERTY_RESEARCH.pdf)

### **Cleveland Heights Main Library**

**2345 Lee Road** <http://www.chuhpl.lib.oh.us/>  
(216) 932-3600

There are clipping files here on various topics and a reference selection of several local history books. The *Sun Press* is also on microfilm starting in 1922. It has gone by various names over the years (*Cleveland Heights Dispatch*, *Heights Press*), but look under *Sun Press* in the microfilm drawer.

City Directories are available in the Reference Area, though some may need to be obtained from the Reference Librarian. Years available are 1922-1942; odd years 1947-1951; 1953-1974; 1976; 1978-79; 1997 to present. (Reverse look-up begins about 1930.)

### **Cleveland State University Library,**

**1860 E. 22nd Street** [www.csuohio.edu](http://www.csuohio.edu)  
216-687-5300

Call 216-687-2449 for appointment; limited hours. The *Cleveland Press* clipping file is arranged by topic. You can look up names of people, places, or events and search

out a file. Many reference materials and interesting photos of Greater Cleveland can be found through:

### *The Cleveland Memory Project*

([www.clevelandmemory.org](http://www.clevelandmemory.org))

### *The Cleveland Digital Library*

(<http://web.ulib.csuohio.edu/SpecColl/cdl/>)

### *Cleveland Cartography*

(<http://www.csuohio.edu/CUT/Clevemaps.htm>)

### **Western Reserve Historical Society**

**10825 East Boulevard, University Circle**

[www.wrhs.org](http://www.wrhs.org)

(216) 721-5722

(*Fee for non-members.*)

There is a wealth of information available at Western Reserve Historical Society. These include a detailed photo archive, historic postcards, historic maps, books on Cleveland history, City Directories on microfilm, personal papers of prominent Clevelanders, architects' files, census data, and most importantly, the Women's Civic Club of Cleveland Heights' manuscripts. There are many memoirs and interesting historical clippings and facts within this large box of information. The manuscript includes more general Cleveland Heights history, as opposed to specific information on residences.

### **Cuyahoga County Recorder**

**1219 Ontario; Room 216, 2nd floor** (216) 443-7318

<http://recorder.cuyahogacounty.us>

**\*\*Bring Photo Identification**

Here you can look up the deed history of your property. It is time consuming and tedious work, however, much easier if you first have gotten most of the names and dates from the County Archives maps. You can consult the Grantor/Grantee Index for the names in any given year. This will then refer you to the deed number. Deeds pre-1946 are on microfilm, those post-1946 are on LandTrac database available in the office. Recently much of this information is available on the website, <http://recorder.cuyahogacounty.us> If you'd like more detailed description of the process, call Kara Hamley O'Donnell at the Cleveland Heights Planning Dept., 216-291-4885.

### **Case Western Reserve Univ., Kelvin Smith Library**

**11055 Euclid Avenue**

(216) 368-3506

This library has an interesting archive, the *Plain Dealer* on microfilm, Cleveland history books, Special Collections, etc. There are also old plan books, and old architectural, decorating and construction books and periodicals. This is another good place to look for general local information. CWRU also has the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* available on its website: <http://ech.cwru.edu/>.



This article published by the City of Cleveland Heights, Department of Planning and Development. For additional information contact the City's Historic Preservation Planner at 216-291-4885.