

How to Research Your Home:

Researching the history of your home can be both exciting and frustrating. Unfortunately, there's no set way to research your own home, and everyone has a different experience. While looking online is a good place to start, there are so many sites recommending how to research and what steps can be taken, which ends up getting a little confusing!

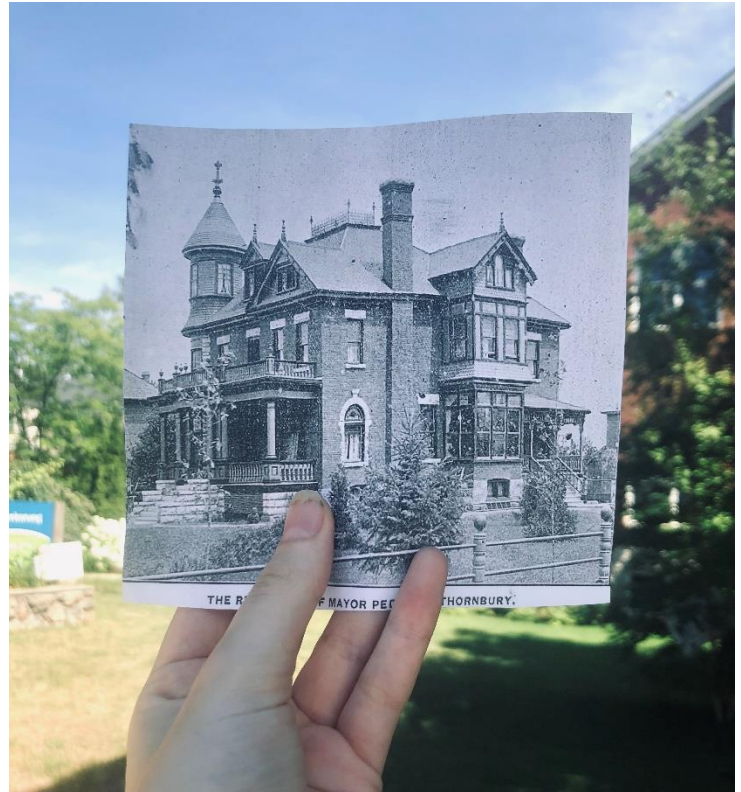
To make things simpler, we have created a compiled list of where to start and what steps should be considered when researching your home!

Before exploring the list further, the most important thing to keep in mind is that researching your home's historic past can be remarkably frustrating. However, it can

be largely rewarding as well. If you find yourself struggling, it might be best to get in contact with a house researcher or an architecture historian. Everyone needs a little help once in awhile, which is what professionals are here for. To find one, here are international databases which anyone can use!

<https://www.apgen.org/cpages/home>

<https://www.bcgcertification.org/>



Helpful Tips Before You Start:

- Stay organized! Word documents make it easy to create various charts and tables where you can include information in an organized fashion. Separating categories can be beneficial and can help you keep track of where you got your information from. Noting where you got information can also be important for cross referencing.
- Remember that sometimes there are properties that end up not having a very extensive history or having dead ends. Feel accomplished on the little bit of information that you came across and feel proud of all the work your put into this project. Be mindful that if you live in an urban area like Toronto, there might be more information on your property than there would be on rural townships.
- Set a goal! What information are you searching for? Are you looking for a past owner? Perhaps you want to know if your home was once another building before turned into a residence?
- Know if you're looking for your building's physical history or social history. The difference between them is:
 - a. Physical History – Information on the actual material of the home, architectural style, or who built it.
 - b. Social History – Knowing what families lived there and when.

It's also a great idea to make sure you are registered for a library card in your local township. Libraries are a great place to learn the history of your town if you want to continue learning after you find your house's history.



First things first --- Get to know your home!

- Talk to your neighbours! They might be able to tell you information about the neighbourhood, past owners, or architectural information.
- Learn the history of your township. If it is a relatively new town, it might not have an extensive history. Still, there might be natural history of the area that is worth exploring.
- Learn about your house's architectural style – Different centuries had different ways of constructing homes. If you suspect you have an earlier settler home, the original owners likely wouldn't have used an architect, and perhaps built the home themselves. Rafters and material such as brick might be dated by stamps with the year and company that they came from. Varying material might suggest that the house was built in stages or if the original building was expanded. Wallpaper and paint are also good indicators of how old a house is. Certain architectural trends typically are only popularized for a couple years at a time before changing into something else. Although this will not give an exact date, there may be indication of what decade they were put in.

- Observe the styles of your neighbour's houses, if they have a similar architecture style to ours, they could be from the same year. Perhaps they even shared the same architect.

Online Research Steps:

- Check if your house is registered as a historic place. Visit Canada's National Registry of Historic Places. <https://www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/register-repertoire.aspx>. If it is, finding out your house's history might be as easy as doing a quick search online.
- Archives Canada is another good resource to start with. It can provide images, past histories, and other information that most researchers are attempting to find.



- Look up the regional land/county registries. This is one of the best resources to use. It can give valuable information such as records on all the legal instruments for the property, as well as the ownership, or title records going back to the date when the property was first purchased.
- Search for land and property records - <https://www.ontario.ca/page/search-land-property-records>

Other Research Steps You Can Take in Your Local Areas:

If information isn't readily available online, you might have to do some digging in person. The best places to retrieve this information is through your local town, archives, libraries, and museums.

- Check for Address changes. If you are unaware if there's been any address changes. Once again, talking to neighbours might be helpful for this. Town records or looking at past council proceedings will also help determine if there have been address changes as well.
- Collect your legal deeds. Dig out your deed and title paperwork, which you received when you closed on your house. Jot down the name of the first owner, the year it was built, the year the original owner sold it, and the names of the owners since then, as well as the years they bought and sold the property. Deeds can be helpful for: chain of ownership, sales history, tax history, and changes to the home's square footage search for property records.
- Check Maps and aerial photographs to see if the addresses may have changed over the years.



- County histories and atlases often show lot names and past owners. Local archives, museums, and libraries are always a good place to start looking for these.
- Check Building Permits from your municipality or town. They can provide information on the architect, what material were used and where they were acquired, and past owners,
- Look at the records of architects and real estate appraisers.
- Fire Insurance Plans – helps determine approximate dates of when the building was built and if there were any changes made. They can be rather complex plans, and it is recommended to have your local archivist to help you navigate through these documents.
- Other documents such as Tax Assessment Rolls and City Directories are another convenient way to discover the construction date of your home.
- Censuses can be a good source when it comes to tracking down past owners. Don't be confused if some information about your home's owners seems contradictory. Early census-takers had varying levels of education, so sometimes ages can be off and birthplaces incorrect. There likely will not be an address provided under each family either, but they're still good sources of information if you're attempting to dig a little deeper for additional information, such as the religion of past inhabitants, and how many children they had.
- Try to find newspapers from your local library or archive. Newspapers are good sources for finding pictures of the property. They are also good for finding information on past crime or break ins, if there were any damages that occurred due to natural disasters or accidents and can provide other information. Many archives have digitized newspapers,

making it a lot simpler if the option to do a key word search for something specific is available.



Steps on How to Use a Land

Records Portal:

1. It's best to know what specific lot, concession, street, or block you would like to research before beginning your search.

2. Open the land records portal

[website](#) and put in the area would like to search. (Ex. Grey County)

3. Make sure you are on the "Historical Books" option. This option is the simplest to use and does not require a service fee.
4. Select the "Browse all Books" option
5. On the new webpage, select the "Browse Abstract/Parcel Register Books" option
6. You will be taken to a page with multiple listings, look for the area you need in the second column to the right and can scroll through the page numbers until you reach the listing you are looking for.

Good Luck! And remember - once you have completed your house research, consider sharing your findings with your local museum, archive and/ or library to help other researchers in the future!

This document was compiled by staff at the Craigeith Heritage Depot as of Feb. 2021.