

Researching the History of Your House (or Other Favorite Building)



OFFICE *of* ARCHAEOLOGY *and* HISTORIC PRESERVATION

1200 Broadway
Denver CO, 80203

A Preservation Program of
HISTORY COLORADO

Are you the proud owner of a historic property? You may want to consider listing it on the National or State Register or obtaining a local historic designation. Not only does this recognize the significance of your property, it also establishes eligibility for various grant and tax credit programs. Whatever way you go, one of the necessary first steps will be to research the history of your building or property to establish its significance.



Don't be discouraged by the prospect of tackling a research project. The challenge comes in knowing where to look; the reward is in rediscovering the past. A good place to start is the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (OAHP) at the History Colorado Center, located at 1200 Broadway in Denver. As the administrators of the Colorado Inventory of Cultural Resources, they have information on some 120,000 sites throughout Colorado and your property may be included. History Colorado's Stephen H. Hart Library & Research Center and the Western History/ Genealogy Department of the Denver Public Library (right across the street) also contain a wealth of research material. You may want to look at the indexes to newspapers and periodicals for relevant articles, explore city, household, and business directories and look at geographical and biographical files. These may provide information about past owners, business operations and dates of construction and alterations. Don't forget to check the photograph collections for possible historic views of your property. If you don't live in the Denver area and you are unable to visit the Stephen H. Hart Library & Research Center or Denver Public Library, look for the same materials at your local public or college library, or contact a local historical society. Most importantly, tell the library staff what you're working on and ask for their advice. Research is a team activity.

Sanborn Insurance Maps are an invaluable resource for urban properties. These meticulously compiled maps were prepared starting in the late 1800s to aid fire insurance companies. The maps reveal details about building shape and size, construction materials, and use. They can also help you establish an estimated construction date and to track the changing development patterns in your neighborhood. While not every Colorado town was recorded, a surprisingly large number were and these maps may be found in various local libraries as well as the Stephen H. Hart Library & Research Center, the Denver Public Library, and the Norlin Library on the Boulder campus of the University of Colorado. Most of these maps are also available for viewing online.



The county tax assessor's office can provide you with legal descriptions, names of former owners, basic floor plan, and dates for recent alterations. They also have estimated construction dates, but these are often inaccurate so try to verify with a second source. The assessor or clerk's office will have property records that

allow you to do a title search for past owners. This is a slow process but persistence can produce a chain of ownership. Those with less patience and a willingness to pay for their information may want to contact a local real estate company or abstractor. These organizations may have or be able to produce a chain of title for you.

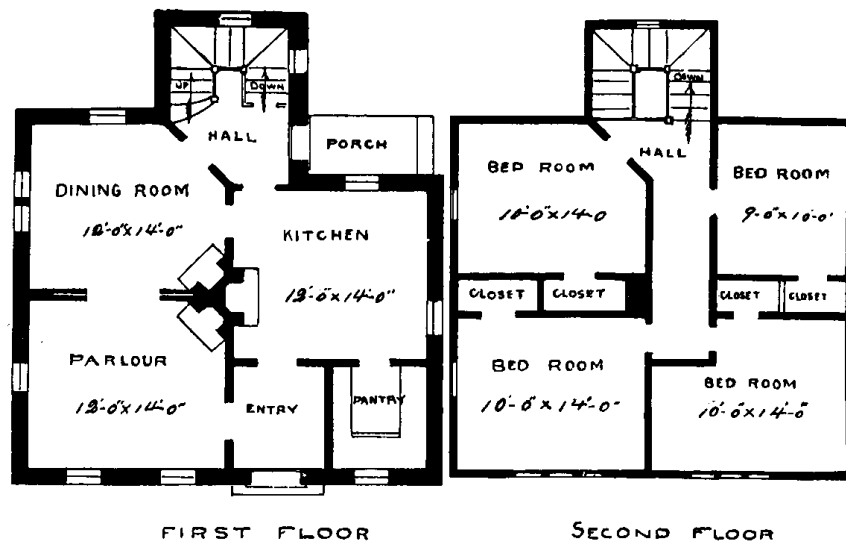
Additional sources to check are the local building or planning office (building permits), water departments (water tap records), church and cemetery records, and estate records. One of the best and most often overlooked resources may be your neighbor. Long-time residents can often tell you interesting facts about your property and its past owners available from no other source. This information can usually be had for the price of a cup of coffee and an hour of your time.

The Stephen H. Hart Library & Research Center and the Denver Public Library have building history search guides keyed to their collections. Information about the Denver Public Library guide is included in the last few pages of this publication. Another resourceful guide to consider is the National Register bulletin, *Researching a Historic Property*.



Don't forget that your house itself can be a treasure trove of information. Differences in materials, patterns, and styles are all tell tale evidence of physical change over time. A systematic architectural investigation may yield information not obtainable in any form of documentation. To assist in this investigation, see the National Park Service preservation brief, *Understanding Old Buildings*.

Whether you're pursuing a nomination or just curious about your property's past, research can be both fun and addictive. Good luck in your search!



(Revised 2/2016)

CHECKLIST

SEARCH STRATEGY FOR DENVER BUILDINGS

DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY WESTERN HISTORY/GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT

10 W. 14th Avenue
Denver, CO 80203 (720-865-1821)
<http://history.denverlibrary.org>

Library Catalog

- ___ Denver neighborhoods
- ___ Architects. Denver
- ___ Architecture. Denver
- ___ Architecture. Domestic. Denver
- ___ Architecture. Directories
- ___ Architecture. Victorian. Denver
- ___ Denver. Social register
- ___ Historic Buildings. Colorado. Denver

General Index and Rocky Mountain News Index

- ___ Name of former and present owner
- ___ Denver. Residences (by name, address)
- ___ Denver. Streets
- ___ Denver. Buildings (by name)
- ___ Denver. Buildings. Records
- ___ Denver. Business

Colorado Collection

- ___ Revised Denver Inventory
- ___ State-wide Inventory of Historic Sites
- ___ Denver Landmarks Commission, 1973-2010

Directories

- ___ Denver City Directory, 1873-present
- ___ Denver Householder's Directory,
1924-present
- ___ Denver Business Directory
(broken holdings 1890-1928)
- ___ Colorado State Business Directory
(broken holdings 1875-1950)

Atlases

- ___ Sanborn - 1887
- ___ Robinson - 1887
- ___ Sanborn - 1890
- ___ Baist - 1905

- ___ Sanborn - 1929 (corrected to 1955)
- ___ Redi - 1973-74
- ___ Realty fiche - 1978-on

Manuscripts

- ___ Denver building permits
(broken holdings 1889-1955)

Card catalog

- ___ Architects
- ___ Denver. Residences
- ___ Denver. Real estate block books
- ___ Denver. Buildings

Photographs

- ___ Denver. Residences
- ___ Denver. Streets
- ___ Denver. Buildings (by name)

Newspapers

- ___ Neighborhood newspapers

Building Permits

- ___ Denver 1889-1955

Building Plans

- ___ Architectural Drawings

OTHER DPL DEPARTMENTS

Documents Division

- ___ Boiler permits 1915-1955

Genealogy

- ___ Federal census 1860-1880
- ___ Colorado census 1885
- ___ Ancestry Library Edition 1860 -1940

To find information on properties outside Denver, replace the name "Denver" in the above sources with the name of your community.

**HISTORY COLORADO
OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND
HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

1200 Broadway
Denver, CO 80203 (303-866-3392)
<http://www.historycolorado.org/oahp>

Site Files Database

- ___ Inventory form on property
- ___ Architectural Drawings
- ___ National or State Register nomination forms, also available at
<http://www.historycolorado.org/oahp/listed-properties>

Report Library

- ___ Survey reports and contexts

Reference Library

- ___ Colorado style books

Building Permits

- ___ Denver 1889-1905 only
(pre 1889 do not exist due to fire)

**HISTORY COLORADO
STEPHEN H. HART LIBRARY &
RESEACH CENTER**

1200 Broadway
Denver, CO 80203 (303-866-2305)
<http://www.historycolorado.org/researchers/researchers>

Library Catalog (available online -HC website)

- ___ Denver neighborhoods
- ___ Architects. Denver
- ___ Architecture. Denver
- ___ Architecture. Domestic. Denver
- ___ Architecture. Directories
- ___ Architecture. Victorian. Denver
- ___ Denver. Social register
- ___ Historic Buildings. Colorado. Denver

Reference and Vertical Files

- ___ Name of former and present owner
(biographical vertical file index available on website)
- ___ Denver. Neighborhoods
- ___ Denver. Residences (by name, address)
- ___ Denver. Streets
- ___ Denver. Buildings (by name)
- ___ Denver. Buildings. Records
- ___ Denver. Business

Directories

- ___ Telephone Directories, 1880-present
- ___ Denver City Directory, 1866-1986
- ___ Denver Householder's Directory
(1926-1956; after 1958, the Householder Directory was not published as a separate directory - a listing by address was part of the Denver City Directory)
- ___ Colorado State Business Directory, 1875-1956

Atlases

- ___ Sanborn - 1887-1962 (available on microfilm; list of holdings on HC website)
- ___ Robinson - 1887
- ___ Baist - 1905

Census Records

- ___ Colorado Federal 1860-1940
- ___ State 1885
- ___ U.S. Federal Census 1860-1940 through Ancestry Library Edition (available at the library)

Manuscripts

- ___ Architects
- ___ Denver. Residences
- ___ Denver. Buildings
- ___ MSS Index

Maps

- ___ City maps, street maps

Photographs (collection indexes on HC website)

- ___ Denver. Residences
- ___ Denver. Streets
- ___ Denver. Buildings (by name)

Newspapers

- ___ Town & Neighborhood newspapers

Other Resources

- ___ CWA cards and Pioneer Interviews
- ___ Colorado Magazine, 1923-present

To find information on properties outside Denver, replace the name "Denver" in the above sources with the name of your community.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Digital newspapers:

<http://coloradohistoricnewspapers.org>

Searchable database of early Colorado newspapers online.

Photographs:

<http://h-co.org/collections>

<http://www.historycolorado.org/researchers/photography-collections>

Digital images of photos from the collections of the DPL, Stephen H. Hart Library.

<http://digital.denverlibrary.org>

Digital images of photos from the collections of DPL & History Colorado

<http://cdm15981.contentdm.oclc.org/>

Pikes Peak Library District digital collection

Colorado Sanborn Insurance Maps:

<http://libcudl.colorado.edu/sanborn/index.asp>

<http://www.denverlibrary.org/database/s>

Available online through CU libraries or DPL

Other Maps:

<http://ucdlibraries.colorado.edu/map/index.htm>

University of Colorado, Boulder

Other Resources:

Creating Your Community website

(Please note this website was taken down in 2015, but all of the information was moved to DPL's photo collection and other collection accessible at the following website links)

<https://digital.denverlibrary.org/cdm/search/collection/p15330coll26>

<https://history.denverlibrary.org/>

National Park Service:

National Register Bulletin

Researching a Historic Property

<http://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb39/>

Preservation Briefs

Understanding Old Buildings

<http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/35-architectural-investigation.htm>



El Jebel Temple, Denver ca.1920 CHS.X7764



Pikes Peak Ave, Colorado Springs May 1918
CHS.X5327

STATE ARCHIVES

1313 Sherman Street, Room 1B-20
Denver, CO 80203 (303-866-2358)
<https://www.colorado.gov/archives>

- ___ Land records
- ___ Local government incorporation filings
- ___ Local government minutes and ordinances
- ___ Business incorporation filings
- ___ Fire insurance maps
- ___ County boundary maps
- ___ School district boundary filings (with amendments)
- ___ Architectural drawings of some court houses and town halls
- ___ Architectural drawings of the Colorado State Capitol building
- ___ Architectural drawings of State owned buildings
- ___ Deeds to state owned property
- ___ Photos of public buildings and officials
- ___ Territorial legislative records
- ___ Court records
- ___ Water rights records
- ___ Prison records
- ___ Marriage/Divorce records
- ___ Birth/Death records
- ___ School records
- ___ Military records

CLERK AND RECORDER OFFICE

Wellington E. Webb
Municipal Office Building Department 101
201 W. Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80202 (720-865-5400)

- ___ Property deeds

DENVER LANDMARK PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Wellington E. Webb
Municipal Office Building
201 W. Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80202 (720-865-2942)
<http://www.denvergov.org/preservation>

- ___ Denver Landmarks and districts

SUPREME COURT LIBRARY

The Ralph L. Carr Colorado Judicial Center
2 E 14th Avenue
Denver, CO 80203 (720-625-5110)
<http://cscl.colibraries.org>

- ___ Court Records

DENVER WATER DEPARTMENT

1600 W. 12th Avenue
Denver, CO 80204 (303-628-6000)

- ___ Tap records
- ___ Service record district books

DENVER TAX ASSESSOR'S OFFICE

Wellington E. Webb
Municipal Office Building
Department 406
201 W. Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80202 (720-913-4162)
<https://denvergov.org/property>

- ___ Appraiser cards
- ___ Schedule numbers
- ___ Master property records

OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

TITLE COMPANIES

- ___ Abstract of titles

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Colorado State Office
2850 Youngfield St.
Lakewood, CO 80215 (303-239-3600)
<http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/>

- ___ Homestead records
- ___ Survey plats and field notes
- ___ Land status records

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT DESIGN ENGINEERING DIVISION

Wellington E. Webb
Municipal Office Building, Dept. 608
201 W. Colfax Ave.
Denver, CO 80202 (720-865-8630)

- ___ Legal plat maps

DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY
WESTERN HISTORY/GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT

DENVER BUILDING HISTORY SEARCH GUIDE

For an introduction to the building history search process and tips on locating photographs of buildings, see the Department's Building History Tutorial at <https://history.denverlibrary.org/denver-building-history-tutorial> .

To begin your search, you will need to know the approximate date of construction, legal description, and street name at time of construction for your property.

APPROXIMATE DATE OF CONSTRUCTION

The following Denver real estate or fire insurance atlases will help to establish a range of dates for construction (e.g. it appears in the 1905 atlas but not in the 1903):

Drawers in the Map Area:

1887 - Robinson, E. *Atlas of the City of Denver, Colorado...*
1905 - Baist Co. *Baist's Real Estate Atlas of ... Denver.*

Building History Research Area:

1887 - Sanborn Map Co. *Insurance Maps of Denver, Colorado.* (1 volume).
1903/04 - Sanborn (4 volumes with paste-over updates to early 1925).
1929/30 - Sanborn (11 volumes in 8 with paste-over updates to early 1961).
1974 - Sanborn (3 volumes - incomplete).

The Sanborn maps are also available on microfilm and through the DPL homepage, with and without updates. Once you have located the appropriate sheets for your property, make a copy from the microfilm or website for reference as you continue your search. Be sure to ask if you need help in using the indexes to each of these tools.

LEGAL DESCRIPTION (NAME OF SUBDIVISION, BLOCK, AND LOT NUMBERS)

While addresses and street names may change, these remain the same for a specific property and are needed to access early building permits. These are shown in each of the atlases listed above and can also be found on the Denver Assessor's Office web site at <https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/assessors-office/real-property/alternative-search.html>

STREET NAME AND NUMBER CHANGES

The 1887 and 1903/4 Sanborn and the 1905 Baist atlases often show former and current street names and numbers. Since the legal description does not change, the block, and lot numbers can be used to verify the location of the property.

For further information on the history of street name changes, see *Denver Streets: Names, Numbers, Locations, Logic* by Phil Goodstein in the Building History Research Area.

With the above information, you can search the following tools:

DENVER BUILDING PERMITS

1889-1892 and 1900-1905

Transcriptions and index in the Building History Research Area (Blue volumes). Start with the Legal Description Index in Vol. 3. Edited transcriptions are listed by date in Vol. 2. <http://digital.denverlibrary.org/cdm/search/collection/p16079coll8/>

1906-1914

Microfilm, indexes in the Building History Research Area (Salmon volumes).

1915-1955

Microfilm, filed by street name and number.

Even if your building was constructed earlier, these may show additions or changes.

1970-present

<https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/denver-development-services/help-me-find-/building-permits.html>

These may provide the name of an original owner, builder, or architect.

DENVER ASSESSOR LOT INDEXES 1860-1917 (incomplete)

Microfilm, filed by addition name, lot, and block numbers, index in the Building History Research Area.

These may provide a chain of ownership for your property, but do not indicate whether a structure is on the property.

DENVER HOUSEHOLDER'S DIRECTORY

1924-1958 – Shelved in the Building History Research Area

1959-Present – Varying titles, shelved with Directories in the Genealogy area.

Arranged by street address. Lists residents, owners, and business names. After 1924, owners are indicated by special symbol. Many have been digitized and are available to view in the Digital Collections.

DENVER CITY DIRECTORY

1873-1986 -- Arranged by name. (1893 Directory has a separate printed index by address in the Building History Research Area).

(1873-1960 on microfilm) (1960-1986 in Western History Reading Room)

Lists occupation and residence address. Many have been digitized and are available in the Digital Collections and via the Ancestry Library Edition database.

GENERAL INDEX

This large card file located in the Genealogy area indexes the *Rocky Mountain News* starting in 1865 and other local newspapers, many historical journals, and other items in the Department's collections. Use it to search for names of owners or architects you may have found. There are also extensive listings under Denver - Buildings, Denver - Residences, Denver - Streets, Denver - Neighborhoods, etc. Be sure to ask at the Reference Desk if you have any questions about any of the entries.

CLIPPING FILES

Ask for these at the Reference Desk. Headings are similar to those of the General Index.

PHOTOGRAPHS

The Department has an extensive collection of photographs including many of Denver residences, streets, people, etc. Many photographs of Denver and Colorado buildings are now online at <http://digital.denverlibrary.org>.

ARCHITECTURAL PLANS

These are available for only a selected number of buildings in the Department's Manuscripts Collections. Ask at the Reference Desk.

CENSUS

The census records for Denver can give a more in-depth picture of a neighborhood including such things as nationality, occupation, etc. The 1910 census is especially useful since there is an index for Denver by neighborhood at the Reference Desk.

LIBRARY CATALOG <http://denverlibrary.org>

The Department's book, manuscript, and map collections; including books on Denver history, architecture, neighborhoods, etc.; are listed here.

(2/2016)



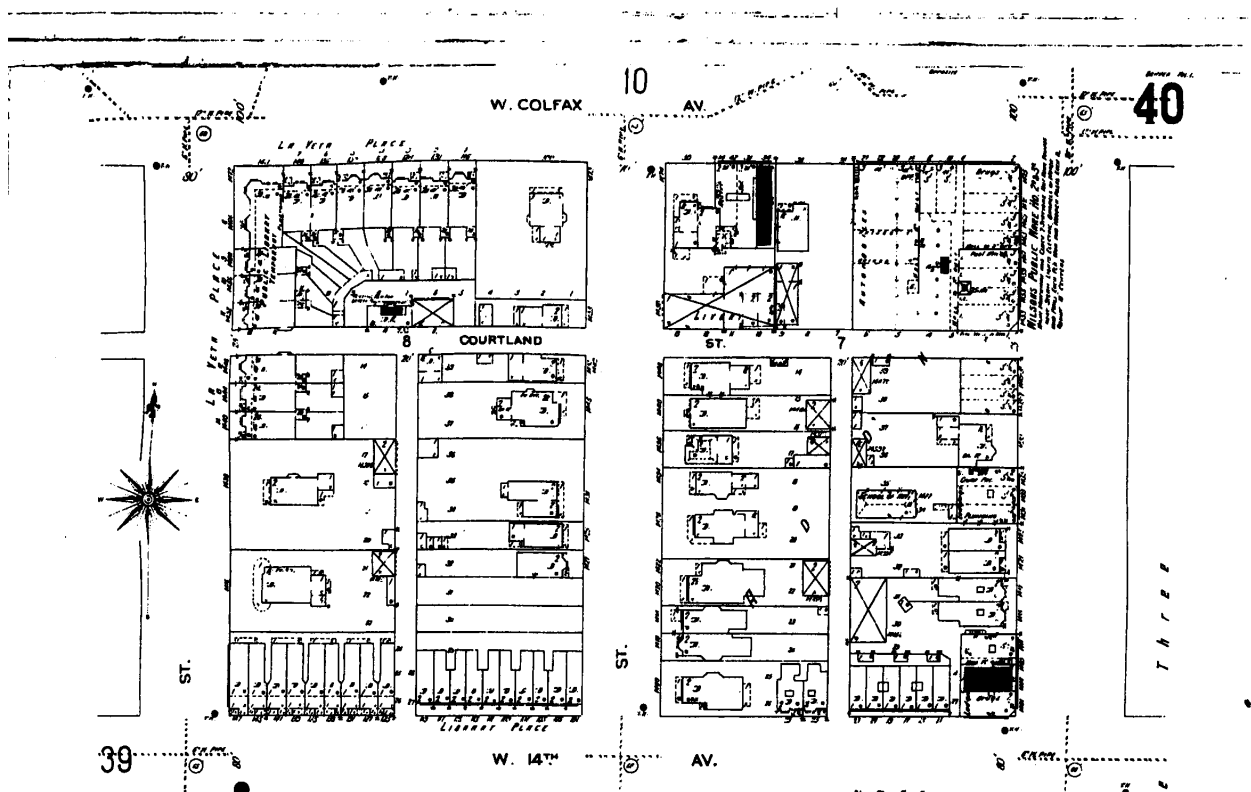
Martha Weiser House, Boulder County 2012

DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY
WESTERN HISTORY/GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT

ACCESSING SANBORN MAPS ONLINE

(Available in the Library or from outside with a Denver Library Card)

1. Go to the Library's web page at <http://denverlibrary.org>
2. Under "Research" click on "Databases A-Z."
3. Under "s" click on "Sanborn Maps".
4. Follow the steps to select "State", "City", and "Date".
5. Click on "Help" for assistance in navigating the site.
6. For Denver maps, it is usually easier to determine the correct page by first using the hard-copy in the Western History/Genealogy Department on the fifth level of the Central Library.
7. For best results when printing, click on "Download Map" and print the higher resolution Adobe PDF version. Use the Adobe "Snapshot" tool to print only a portion of the image.



(2/2016)