

# A Condensed Guide to Researching Your Home

*There are four basic categories of information to be researched in order to develop a comprehensive home history that may also meet ONEN's plaque application requirements. Below, we address those categories and identify many of the resources which have proven to be most useful to researchers.*

## **Determining the Owners and Occupants**

### **Owner List**

- ONEN Historic Preservation Committee members will provide you with some research results on early owners of your home. For more recent owner names and recording information, you may need to search the Assessor Spatielist website and/or call the El Paso County Assessor's Office at 520-6600 and request a list of owners, deed dates, and recording information for your property. You should have the legal description and schedule number for your property available when you make this request. The title researchers in the Assessor's Office may take several weeks to provide the owner information to you as they have a heavy workload, and fulfilling these requests is not part of their regular job responsibilities. Even if you do not plan to pursue historic house plaques, the ownership record will provide you with the names to research to help you develop the story of your home.
- To obtain the actual deed copies (which are required if you will be making application for a house plaque), you will need to take the list of owners and deed recording information to the Clerk and Recorder's Office at 1675 W. Garden of the Gods Road, research the microfilm, and make copies of the deeds. (See end of this document for steps involved at the Clerk and Recorder's Office.) Should you decide to obtain deed copies, there is a small fee per page for legible printed copies of microfilmed deeds. Note: Recorder's Office staff members do not perform the deed research task for the public.

### **Occupants**

- Annual City Directories are the best source of information about who has lived in, but not necessarily owned, your home. Hard copies of city directories are located in the Special Collections Department of Penrose Library at 20 N. Cascade. Microfilm of 1879-2000 directories can also be found in the Carnegie Library/Special Collections.
- Many directories from 1879 to 1922 can be accessed remotely through the library website at ppld.org. Go to the site, click on Research, Regional History, and City Directories to access these PDFs. Additional directories up to the 1960s are available remotely through the HeritageQuest portal on the library's website. Go to the ppld.org site, click on Research, Regional History, and HeritageQuest. A login screen will appear as your library card number and pin are required to access this resource. If you do not have a library card/login credentials, visit the desk on the main level of the library to complete the necessary requirements.
- Beginning with 1901, the directories are indexed by both street address and occupant name. Prior to 1901, directories can be researched only by the occupant's name. This is a bit handicapping if you have a home that was built in the 1890s, but you can start your search of the pre-1901 directories by using the names of the property owners that you have obtained from ONEN or the Assessor. An owner name search may not result in a directory entry showing them at your address as many homes in the Old North End were built as rentals. If the name resulting from a city directory address search matches the name on a deed for the same time period (year or range of years), then you have found an owner-occupant.
- When researching, use a legal pad or form such as the one included in the Old North End Plaque Application kit to make notes of the directory year, occupant names, dates of occupancy, and employment, if referenced, as you search through various city directories. (Or use the camera on your smart phone to capture the information for later transfer to the plaque application, if applicable.) If you are using the 1901 and newer directories, try researching both the address and the occupant's name as different information may appear under the listings (e.g., family members also occupying the property, occupation, whether a boarder, etc.). The earliest year that your address appears in a directory **may** be a clue to, or supporting documentation for, the date of construction.

## Determining the Date of Construction

- Because blueprints, permits, etc., have been lost over the years, it can be difficult to determine the exact date/year of construction. It is not unusual to have to use multiple resources to zero in on a construction date.

(Plaque applications for which a permit or other confirming documentation cannot be found can be approved with a circa date (ex: c. 1902) which indicates the likely year of construction based on a combination of news articles, city directories, plat maps and other sources noted below.)

- Be aware that it was not uncommon for houses to have been moved from an original location (often in the downtown area) to the Old North End. If the first date of occupancy seems out of sync with an expected earlier construction date, ask at Penrose Special Collections for the moving permits dating back to 1911 which show the former and current addresses and legal description of homes that were relocated. Note: the ONEN Historic Preservation Committee has researched these permits and prepared a spreadsheet that contains a list of houses which have been moved into or out of the neighborhood or destroyed and replaced.
- Available Resources through Penrose Library Special Collections:

**Historic Sites File/card index by address:** at the Special Collections Reference Desk there is a drawer of index cards by address which may contain information about your home. The cards often reflect memories from past residents in the community about occupants of a home, the builder, date of construction, etc. Not every ONEN home is represented, but there have been some significant finds in this card index. Ask the librarian at the desk for this resource.

**Blueprints:** ask reference librarian for their index to blueprints to see if your home's prints may be housed there.

**Building permits:** these documents are also archived in a secure location. Request the index to building permits which exist for 1900 forward (except for 1903). The library has no permit records prior to 1900. As many homes in the Old North End were built prior to 1900, research involving newspapers, magazine articles, plat and insurance maps, etc., may be necessary to determine the year a home was built. Note: the date of construction shown on the El Paso County Assessor website is often an approximate date based on Assessor staff interviews with ONEN residents in the 1960s. Historic Preservation Committee staff may be able to locate a likely construction date using Assessor map records dating back before 1900. Ask us for assistance.

**Water tap records:** request tapping records (available from 1902-1940) which may help zero in on a construction date although many properties on wells did not tap into city water until years after construction.

**Maps of Colorado Springs:** there are drawers containing maps from 1889, 1895, etc., which may indicate whether a building was on your legal description during that period. Ask for assistance from the reference librarian.

**Facts Magazine:** a periodical which frequently referenced the owner names of newly constructed homes for the period from late 1897 through spring of 1903 (with some gaps). Facts Magazine can be researched at the library using the card catalog; articles can then be located on microfilm reels. Some Facts Magazine references show up in Pikes Peak Newsfinder searches. (See Developing the Story later in this document for information on using the Newsfinder.)

**New Year's Day editions of Gazette newspaper** – January 1 newspaper editions for many years beginning in the 1880s listed general information about new homes constructed in the previous year: owner name, street name but not number, building description and in some cases the cost. These articles can be searched on microfilm at Special Collections. Alternatively, ONEN's Historic Preservation Committee has copies from 1882 until 1898 which Old North End homeowners may view upon request.

## Determining the Architectural Style of Your Home

- In addition to documenting the owners and occupants and date of construction on your home, plan to include in your home's story exterior photos of the front, sides, and back views plus a description of the house's architectural features.

Some books which may be helpful in identifying the style of your home include:

*A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia Savage McAlester

*American Architecture: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* by Cyril M. Harris

*How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built* by Stewart Brand

*North End Historic District Guidelines* – available at Penrose Library and also through the Old North End Neighborhood Association for a donation of \$5.00

*Exploring the Old North End of Colorado Springs: A Guide to its History and Architecture* - available at Penrose Library and also for purchase through the Old North End website at [ONEN Books – The Old North End Neighborhood](#) as well as through several local retailers.

- Document whether you have learned of any significant alterations made to the property. As the Old North End is a remarkably intact historic neighborhood with minimal infill of newer construction, it is not unusual to find that houses have undergone changes to their footprint, porches, rooflines, etc., over the years. These changes may be a meaningful part of your home's story. You may have success in finding building permits for these changes to the property at Special Collections or by looking online at the Pikes Peak Regional Building Department's website ([pprbd.org](http://pprbd.org)) under current or archived permits.
- In your write-up you may also wish to include information such as whether your home was ever used as a boarding house, for business purposes, or as a combination of home and place of business.

## Developing the Story of Your Home

- With the list of owners and occupants of your home in hand, you are ready to begin searching for the details to build your home's story. There are many online resources which allow you to do the bulk of this category of research from home.
- Information that can be found within the below-listed online sources includes references to land or home purchases, obituaries, weddings, social events, political beliefs, membership in civic and social organizations, etc. These news articles, census records, genealogy sites, etc., may help you learn what your families did for a living, to what degree they were involved in the community, and whether there is a particularly interesting or well-known person whose story you would like to explore in detail.

Sites which require a library card number and pin are marked with \*\*.

- **Pikes Peak Newsfinder** - indexes the following: local newspaper articles from 1872 to the present (note: articles may reference dates of construction or occupancy information for some addresses); news briefs; social events; obituaries; church death registers; cemetery inventories, etc. Some results may be immediately downloadable as PDFs; others must be requested online with library staff returning a link to the article within a few days. The Newsfinder may also be searched on library computers with the user then pulling the appropriate microfilm and printing up to 10 pages at no cost.  
[http://more.ppld.org:8080/SpecialCollections/index/article\\_search.asp](http://more.ppld.org:8080/SpecialCollections/index/article_search.asp)
- **HeritageQuest\*\*** - this site includes census data, city directories, wills and probate, military records, etc., that can be cut and pasted and/or downloaded.  
<https://ppld.org/databases/heritagequest>

- **Newspaperarchive.com\*\*** - a digitized collection of downloadable articles from nationwide newspapers covering historical and more recent periods; does include Colorado Springs. <https://ppld.org/databases/newspaper-archive>
- **19<sup>th</sup> Century Newspapers\*\*** - searchable, digitized, and downloadable U.S. newspaper articles through 1899 with good Colorado coverage. <https://ppld.org/databases/19th-century-us-newspapers>
- **Ancestry.com** - patrons may use the library edition of this comprehensive genealogy site at no cost but must use it onsite at Penrose Special Collections. Available to individuals for home use for a fee, this site is very helpful if you can find a family tree for your homeowner as there is often much information about extended family to include birth and death dates and locations, family stories, photos, etc. <https://www.ancestry.com/>
- **Find A Grave** - available through HeritageQuest site or you can research a name at findagrave.com or by Googling the person's name followed by Find a Grave. Results may show when and where your homeowner died and an image of their cemetery plot. Some entries include a full obituary as well as links to other family member burial records. <https://www.findagrave.com/>
- **Digital Photos** – historic photos of your home and its owners/occupants can add greatly to your story. In addition to newspaper articles as possible sources, the following are worth searching:

Penrose Library - [PPLD Digital Collections - PPLD Digital Collections \(oclc.org\)](#)

Digital History Collection at Denver Public Library - <https://digital.denverlibrary.org>

- **Articles, Manuscripts** - the following provide informative and detailed descriptions of life in the old North End and Colorado Springs at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Complete History of the Old North End Neighborhood – [CompleteHistoryONENedited-2021.pdf \(oldnorthend.org\)](#)

Century Chest - contains transcriptions of letters written by various community members in 1901 and deposited into a time capsule that was opened in 2001. The letters are from people in all walks of life and address banking, retail, clothing styles, social life, churches, how women spent their days, etc. Some photographs are included in Century Chest as well.

<https://libraryweb.coloradocollege.edu/library/specialcollections/CenturyChest/Appdx.html>

- If your house had a prominent owner or architect, you may also find information at the Pioneers Museum at 215 S. Tejon as they have numerous private paper collections and photographs. See the Museum's website at <https://www.cspm.org/> Collections/Starsmore Center for Local History topics to learn about the types of information that are available and the process for requesting research assistance which may involve an hourly fee.
- There are many other online sites (e.g., Genealogy Bank, FamilySearch) as well as hard copy reference materials available at Penrose Special Collections (social register, high school yearbooks, etc.) that may help you complete the story of your home and its owners and occupants. The above suggestions are those that have generally resulted in sufficient information to complete an Old North End house plaque application.

*We are excited for your journey in researching the history of your home. The process can be both highly rewarding and seriously frustrating. Should you find yourself at a point where you don't know what your next steps should be and need suggestions, members of the Old North End Historic Preservation Committee are willing to try to help.*

Contact us at [historicpreservation@oldnorthend.org](mailto:historicpreservation@oldnorthend.org).

## Supplement to page 1 -

### How to Locate Deeds at the County Clerk's Office:

The County Clerk is located at 1675 West Garden of the Gods Road. Take the owner list provided by the Assessor's Office and/or ONEN's Historic Preservation Committee with you to find the deeds for the property.

- The list will have a book or reception number and possibly a date of recording for each deed transfer. Go to the desk and request the microfilm reel that contains that book or reception number.
- There is a microfilm reader that has a printer attached. Use that machine if it is open. If it is not, you will need to find your deed, note the book and page number, and then take the reel back to the desk and ask them to print it for you.
- Reels often contain more than one book. Each book has a title page, usually with a white background, and you will need to scroll to the proper book.
- To determine the page of your deed (if not provided on the Assessor document), you will need to use the grantee index at the beginning of the book.
- The microfilm may be difficult to read as the entries are hand written, and the lettering is light. You may need to zoom in to make the words out.
- The index is alphabetized by the first letter of the grantee's last name, but entries are in random order. For example, if your grantee is named Campbell, you may have to scan the entire list of "C" names to find the correct entry.
- Be aware that your owner may have purchased other properties in that same time period. Some people built homes in our neighborhood as an investment, and their name will appear several times.
- Once you have found the name, to the right of the name will usually be a brief property description such as "Block 210". Be sure that this matches your property. There will also be a page number listed.
- Scroll to the page number and review the deed. Make sure that the property legal description matches your property. The deed may not reflect a street address. Occasionally, you will see stipulations on the type of structure that may be built on the property.
- The purchase amount on the deed will likely be "one dollar and other valuable considerations". This is common, and was likely done for tax purposes. It does not reflect value or the sales price.
- Be aware that your property legal description may have evolved over time. The original owner may have purchased lots 3 and 4, and now your property description is the "west 50 feet of lot 3". This means that a portion of the property was sold off. It does not mean that you have the wrong deed.
- Make a copy of the deed. You may have to play with the light/dark and zoom buttons on the microfilm reader to get a readable copy. If your printed copy is not legible, transcribe the grantor (seller), the grantee (purchaser), the date, and the legal description. You may also ask staff at the desk if they have someone available to scan the microfilm page needed as a scan may result in a much more legible copy. There is not always someone available to perform this task; you may have to return another day for assistance.
- If, for any reason, you do not have the book or reception number for a deed, you can request the grantee reel for the year of the deed. You will need to look through the grantee index for your owner's name, and it will tell you the book number and possibly the page number needed to locate your deed.

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