

RESEARCHING HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Technical Paper No. 9



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Introduction

Researchers seeking to document the history of houses and other buildings have a variety of aids with which to work. Getting to know the resource and networking agencies and organizations and learning how to use their directories, guides, indexes, files, catalogs and publication lists can save the researcher a considerable amount of time, expense, and frustration. There are literally hundreds of agencies and organizations involved in the management of heritage information and resources. The listings included below may help you to understand how some research materials may be accessed.

For some buildings there will be comparatively little information available in public records. Some records and archival management programs have been late in developing, and they are still poorly funded in many areas. Even larger counties and municipalities may only be beginning to arrange and describe their holdings for public access. There may well be occasional gaps in some of the record series. Where possible, try to locate experienced resource people--knowledgeable individuals often hold the key to the information you may need.

A variety of technical assistance materials on preservation and rehabilitation of historic houses and buildings is readily available but is not covered in this paper. The best sources of such material are the historic preservation programs and agencies at national, state, county, and local levels. King County Historic Preservation Program *Technical Paper 12, Restoration Resource Guide* provides an overview of resources. A list of technical assistance links is also available.

Archival Resources

The Washington State Archives and Records Management Division, P.O. Box 9000, Olympia, WA 98504, (360) 753-5485, or internet at <http://www.secstate.wa.gov/archives>, has a list of publications and micropublications. There are regional repositories around the state including Bellevue. Regional archivists are knowledgeable about resources in their districts. The state also has a two volume *Guide to Historical Records of Washington State* that is often very helpful. It can be found at regional libraries. The Puget Sound Regional Branch of the Archives holds the King County Assessor's Property Tax Record, or "*PR*" *Cards*, which often include photos of houses and buildings as they appeared in the late 1930s and early 1940s. They can be accessed only by a short legal description or the tax lot (parcel) number.

The Puget Sound Regional Branch holds other useful sources for historic site research. These include Real and Personal Property Assessment Rolls, Corporation Filings, Probate Records, Chattel Mortgage and Conditional Sales Recordings, and General Recordings Indexes. Research materials are available for on-site reference at the State Archives Puget Sound Regional Branch by appointment only. Copies of Property Record Cards may also be ordered by telephone. For information on

research appointments and copy, mailing, and photograph reprint charges, call the Puget Sound Branch at (425) 564-3940. The holdings of many public archival repositories increase periodically, so check for new materials that may not be listed in current guides.

The Seattle Public Schools Archives, 1330 N. 90th Street, Seattle, WA 98103, (206) 298-7795, or internet at <http://www.seattleschools.org> holds some material that pertains to the contextual history of communities. Student produced publications sometimes have focused on community history.

University of Washington

Although colleges and universities around the state should be checked for local resources, the University of Washington has an unusually large and useful collection. The Northwest Collection, Historical Photography Collection, Architectural History Collection, Map Collection, Periodical Index, and Manuscripts and Archives Collection are valuable. There is a brochure, *Resources in Pacific Northwest Architectural History*, which describes the holdings of the Special Collections and Preservation Division.

Many of the collections are located at the Allen Library. Call (206) 543-1929 for the Northwest Collection (including Photography and Architectural Collections) and (206) 543-1879 for the Manuscripts and Archives Collections. The Architectural Collection is indexed, as are the periodicals. The University Libraries have published a *Comprehensive Guide to the Manuscripts Collection* and *Personal Papers in the University Archives* as well as a guide to *Pacific Northwest Newspapers on Microfilm at the University of Washington Libraries*. The internet address for UW Libraries is <http://www.lib.washington.edu>. Another valuable tool for research is Cascade, the interlink of state university libraries at <http://cascade.lib.washington.edu>.

Library Resources

The Washington State Library, P.O. Box 42460, WA 98504-2460, (360) 753-5592, or internet at <http://www.statelib.wa.gov> has a valuable state government document collection, a Washington Room (360) 753-4024, inter-library loan capabilities and access to the Washington Library Network. Larger municipal libraries around the state often have fine local collections, including regional photographic collections, but even some of the local libraries have resources. It is not uncommon to find some King County materials in the county and municipal libraries of Pierce, Snohomish, Kittitas and Kitsap Counties. An example of a regional collection is the Richards Studio Photograph Collection (800,000 images) or Green River Watershed materials at the Tacoma Public Library. You may not always find items listed in the catalog or vertical file—but check with the librarian for special holdings. In King County, several municipal or King County Library System branch libraries have regional history or genealogical collections, including the Burien and the Bellevue Regional branches. Bellevue has an extensive history collection and microfilm of many of the Sanborn Insurance Company maps. The King County Library catalog is accessible on-line at <http://www.kcls.org>

The Seattle Public Library, 800 Pike Street, Seattle, WA 98101 or (206) 386-4636 has a fine History Department and Genealogy Collection. Historic resources include periodicals, a variety of maps including historic Sanborn Company insurance maps, architectural scrapbooks, a Northwest Index, ephemera, The Seattle Collection, and city directories. The Library issues a brochure, *Community Resources about Seattle Buildings*, which is a handy guide to the sources. Howard Droker's booklet

Seattle Directory: A Guide to Researching This City's Past, although published in 1980, is still valuable and is available at some branch libraries, some of which also house growing neighborhood history collections. The Seattle Library catalog is accessible on-line at <http://www.spl.lib.wa.us>. For library card holders, a complete national file of electronic Sanborn Insurance Company Maps is available by selecting Web Sites & Data Bases/Genealogy & Biography/Digital Sanborn Maps.

County Records

The King County Archives, 1215 E. Fir St., Seattle, (206) 296-1538 or internet at <http://www.metrokc.gov/recelec/archives> has produced a ***Historical Records Guide*** (1996), which provides valuable information on county records. The Records and Elections Division, Room 311, County Administration Building, 4th and James, Seattle, WA 98104 (296-1536) holds plats, atlases, title deeds, mortgage records and other materials. King County Roads Services, Division Map Counter at 201 South Jackson St. First Floor, Seattle WA 98104, has a variety of maps and plats of value to researchers. For information, contact the Map Counter at (206) 296-6548, E-mail at map.roads@metrokc.gov, or internet at <http://www.metrokc.gov/kcdot/roads/rwmap.htm>.

Municipal Records

Some cities and towns may have records that relate to construction and other permits. In Seattle, the Department of Construction and Land Use (DCLU), 700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000, Seattle, WA 98104-5070 has publications and microfilm records. The DCLU has several ***Client Assistance Memos*** of interest, including No 107 ***DCLU Public Records*** and No. 233: ***Sources for Property Information*** that can be accessed on-line at <http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/dclu> (select Publications). Some information on properties is available, but the records are often far from complete. The Engineering Department should also be checked for photos and records of value. The City of Seattle Archives at 600 4th Ave., 1st floor, (206) 684-8353, has produced a ***Guide to the Archives of the City of Seattle***, which is very useful. The Archives may also have valuable information on records held by city departments and offices. The archives guide is accessible on-line at <http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/seattle/leg/clerk/archhome.htm>.

Federal Records

The National Archives Northwest Branch, 6125 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, WA 98105 or (206) 526-6507 has some information that may be helpful. In addition to census data, the Archives has federal survey maps and a ***Guide to Records in the National Archives--Pacific Northwest Region***. The Guide is also available on microfiche. In addition, the Archives circulate a series of valuable brochures on specific research topics, including: ***Land Records at the National Archives, Pacific NW Region***; ***Family and Community History Resources at the National Archives Pacific Northwest Region***; and several others on ethnic and genealogical topics. Copies of regional guides and other information is available via <http://www.nara.gov>.

Museums, Historical Organizations & Genealogical Groups

The Washington Museum Association, P.O. Box 5817, Factoria Station, Bellevue, WA 98006 or internet at www.washingtonstatemuseums.org publishes an excellent ***Directory of Museums of Washington State***, which lists nearly 500 organizations. Museums around the state often have local

history publications, research files, historic site tour guides, and photographic collections of value. The WMA directory is available on-line.

The Washington State Historical Museum Research Center, 315 N. Stadium Way, Tacoma, WA 98403, (253) 798-5914, or internet at <http://www.wshs.org> holds the Asahel Curtis photo collection which includes a number of images of residential properties commissioned by real estate agents as well as many other significant images.

The Eastern Washington State Historical Society's Cheney Cowles Museum, West 2316 First Avenue, Spokane, WA 99204 or internet at <http://www.cheneycowles.org>, has an architectural history collection as well as fine collections of photos and ephemera. The Museum's Archives has a searchable Guide to the Manuscript Collections that includes some Kirtland Cutter and Cutter & Malmgren information.

The Museum of History and Industry, 2700 24th Avenue East, Seattle, WA 98112, (206) 324-1126, or internet at <http://www.seattlehistory.org> has a marvelous collection of photography, with many fine residential views, especially in the Post-Intelligencer and the PEMCO/Webster and Stevens Collections.

Umbrella organizations can also help to locate historical societies: the Association of King County Historical Organizations, P.O. Box 3257, Seattle, WA 98114 has more than 70 member groups, many of which specialize in community and neighborhood history. The AKCHO member directory is listed on HistoryLink at <http://www.historylink.org> under Links Plus/Association of King County Historical Organizations.

The Seattle Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 75388, Seattle, WA 98125-0388, (206) 682-1410, or internet at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~waseags> has a good research collection and a publication series. Other genealogical groups who have research collections and publications include: Eastside Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 374, Bellevue, WA 98009-0374 or internet at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~wakcegs> and South King County Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 3174, Kent, WA 98032-0203 or internet at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~waskcgs>. The Washington State Genealogical Society, Post Office Box 14222, Olympia, WA 98507 or internet at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~wasgsg> has an affiliate network of local organizations around the state. In addition to pioneer indexes, the local groups also have web sites, libraries, newsletters and contacts.

Preservation Organizations and Agencies

The Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, 1204 Minor Avenue, Seattle WA 98101, can help to locate preservation organizations and activists around the state. The Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, P.O. Box 48343, Olympia, WA 98504-8343, (360) 586-3065, or internet at <http://www.oahp.wa.gov> can direct you to preservation offices, planners and planning departments throughout the state who maintain historic site inventories. Some of these agencies have helpful technical assistance materials. In addition, the Office has on file copies of the cultural resource inventories available for localities around the state and publishes a helpful *Architectural Description Guide*.

In Seattle, the Historic Preservation Program, 700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1700, Seattle, WA 98104, (206) 684-0464, or internet at <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/> maintains the Seattle

Landmarks Register, an inventory of the city's historic properties, architectural files and resource contacts. Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority, 1117 Minor Avenue, Seattle, WA 98101, (206) 622-6952, or internet at <http://www.historicseattle.org> has produced several publications and a series of handy, map format *Urban Resource Inventories* for a number of Seattle neighborhoods. Historic Seattle has also published a *Glovebox Guide to Washington's Historic Houses*. Historic Seattle also conducts educational workshops for historic property owners.

The King County Historic Preservation Program, 701 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2000, Seattle, 98104-2307, (206) 296-8689, or internet at <http://www.metrokc.gov/exec/culture>, maintains the County Landmarks Register, a Historic Site Inventory, and information generated about historic properties in cities with which King County has an interlocal agreement for historic preservation services. There is also a helpful *Technical Papers* series, a listing of area historical groups and a *Historical Papers* series, which includes bibliographies of Seattle neighborhoods and planning areas of King County. The bibliographies are helpful in locating community history materials important to understanding the local historical context. A number of cities and towns are also involved with historic preservation activities and historic site inventories. Check with the planning department or cultural resources program of your local municipality for copies of inventory files and publications. Technical Paper No. 8 in this series, *Landmark and Historic Site Information*, is a good overview of the materials available on historic resources in the built environment at all levels of government.

Private Sources

In researching historic houses, it should be stressed that much of the best research material about historic properties is still in private hands. Interviews with past or present property owners are often one of the best means of locating information. Very often historical societies, museums, genealogical societies and pioneer associations can be helpful in locating previous owners or their descendants. The family history associated with photo albums, scrapbooks, diaries, papers, records and manuscripts is often the most valuable resource of all. Some current property owners have had contact with the families of previous owners and can make referrals to them. Neighbors are also sometimes sources of information.

Aerial Photos and Maps

Aerial photos are sometimes helpful in documenting property development. In King County, the oldest series of photos dates to about 1936. For information in Seattle, consult the "yellow pages" of the telephone directory for "Photographers--Aerial" for listings. Some public agencies also have aerial photos on file, and public archivists usually can assist in locating them. Commercial map companies may have historic maps and atlases of interest to researchers. Consult the telephone directory yellow pages for information on them. For additional information on aerial photos, maps and geographic information see Technical Paper No. 49, *Maps & Place Name Resources* in this series.

Other Resources

There are many fine publications available for the old house researcher. Among the good general introductions are:

Howe, Barbara et al., *Houses and Homes: Exploring Their History*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1987; and

Light, Sally, *House Histories: A Guide to Tracing the Genealogy of Your Home*, Spencertown, N.Y.: Golden Hill Press 1991.

The Association for State and Local History, 530 Church Street, Suite 600, Nashville, TN 37201, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20036, and the Old House Journal, 69A Seventh Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217 all have valuable publication lists.

Other publishers of interest include: *American Bungalow Magazine*, 123 South Baldwin Avenue, P.O. Box 756, Dept. J, Sierra Madre, CA 91025-0756; and the *Craftsman Homeowner Newsletter*, 31 South Grove Street, East Aurora, N.Y. 14052.

A short selection of publications you may find helpful in researching a house's historical context and in identifying its style includes:

Blumenson, John J.G., *Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms, 1600-1945*, 2nd ed.,:Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

Downing, Andrew Jackson, *The Architecture of Country Houses*. New York: De Capo, 1968.

Fitch, James Marston, *American Building and the Historical Forces that Shaped It*. New York, Schocken Books, 1973.

Glover, Margaret, "Horizontal Log Construction Corner Types," in *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Fall 1982.

Gowans, Alan. *The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture, 1890-1930*. Cambridge: MIT, 1986.

Grimmer, Anne et al. "Historic Log Structures: A Selected, Annotated Bibliography", Preservation Technology Update, *CRM Bulletin*, Vol. 13, No. 5, 1990.

Handlin, David P., *The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1979.

King County Historic Preservation Program, Historical Paper No. 3. *Overview of King County History*, Seattle.

-----, "Seattle Neighborhoods Bibliography", Historical Paper No. 6, Seattle, Revised 9/96.

-----, "King County Planning Areas Bibliography", Historical Paper No. 5, Seattle, Revised 6/96.

Kreisman, Lawrence, *Made to Last: Historic Preservation in Seattle and King County*, 1999, Seattle, University of Washington Press.

Lancaster, Clay, *The American Bungalow, 1880-1930*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1985.

Massey, James C. and Shirley Maxwell, *House Styles in America: The Old House Journal Guide to the Architecture of American Homes*, (Brooklyn, 1995) Old House Journal.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Knopf, 1985.

McMurry, Sally Ann, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change*, New York: Oxford, 1988.

Newcomb, Rexford, "Regionalism in American Architecture." in, Merrill Jensen, ed., *Regionalism in America*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951.

Noble, Allen George, *Wood, Brick and Stone: the North American Settlement Landscape*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984.

Ochsner, Jefferey K. et al, *Shaping Seattle Architecture: A Historical Guide to the Architects*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994.

Poppeliers, John et al., *What Style Is It?* Washington DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1986.

Seattle Office of Urban Conservation, "Urban Conservation: A Bibliography", Seattle, n.d.

Tremaine, David G., *Indian and Pioneer Settlement of the Nooksack Lowland, Washington, to 1890*, Bellingham: Center for PNW Studies, Western Washington State College, 1975.

Upton, Dell, *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups That Built America*. Washington, DC: National Trust, 1986.

Vaughn, Thomas and Virginia Guest Ferriday, eds., *Space, Style and Structure: Building in Northwest America*. Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1974.

Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, *Built in Washington*. Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989.

West, Pamela, "The Rise and Fall of the American Porch," *Landscape*. Vol. 20 (Spring 1976), 42-47.

Woodbridge, Sally and Roger Montgomery, *A Guide to Architecture in Washington State*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980.

Wright, Gwendolyn, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. New York: Pantheon, 1981.

<p>This information is available upon request in alternative formats for persons with disabilities at (206) 296-7580 TTY.</p>
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