

HOW TO RESEARCH YOUR HOUSE

UTAH STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE (SHPO)

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First, check to see whether your house has already been documented. The SHPO has files on thousands of buildings throughout the state, including those listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These files are currently being scanned and should be available online in 2020. Until then, scans or copies can be obtained at the SHPO offices at 300 S. Rio Grande (historic Rio Grande Depot), Salt Lake City, UT, 84101, or by contacting Preservation staff directly: <https://history.utah.gov/preservation/>, bottom of page.

If your house has not been documented previously, then you should check the following sources for information:

1. **Title abstracts** (County Recorder's Office)--Research all the transactions involving your property (within a reasonable date-range of when it was probably built), noting the date, names of buyers and sellers, dollar amounts, and types of transactions (warranty deed, quit claim deed, mortgage, etc.; skip over incidental recordings that don't result in a change of ownership). You will probably need access to original hard-copy abstract books (in the "vault," most likely), not just the digital records accessed at terminals in the Recorder's Office that are used for the routine title searches that don't require research beyond a few decades. Indications of a construction date are the first relatively large mortgage or the dramatic increase in the selling price of the property. Note: you will need the legal description of the property to do this research, not simply the address. Getting the names of property owners through this research, though sometimes difficult, is key to creating a solid history of your house.
2. **Sanborn Maps** (Research Center of the State Archives/State History and the U of U's Marriott Library)--Contact the Research Center (<http://historyresearch.utah.gov/>) for details on which maps are available. Many older Sanborn maps can be found online at the Marriott Library digital collections site: <http://content.lib.utah.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/sanborn-jp2>. These fire insurance maps were drawn for over 75 communities in the state, many as early as the late 1880s, and were updated periodically as late as 1969. The maps show each building on the principal blocks in the community, and they are color coded to indicate construction materials, height, and other features. By comparing the maps from different years, you can determine approximate construction dates and what changes have been made to the building and property over the years.
3. **Tax Files** (County Assessor's Office or County Archives for Salt Lake Co. (<http://admin.slco.org/archives/>)) --The file for a property usually provides an estimated date of construction (don't trust it completely, though dates for post-WWII seem to be more accurate). The file may also contain an older photograph of your house and perhaps other structural information, including a building footprint drawing.
4. **Building Permit Registers** (Salt Lake City, 1889-1954 and Provo, 1922-25,1928) (Research Center)--These provide the date the permit was issued, the address of the property, the estimated cost of construction, a brief description of the building, the name of the owner, and sometimes the names of the architect and builder.
5. **Newspapers** (Research Center and university libraries)--Newspapers for many Utah communities are on microfilm, and many are also available online in the Utah Digital Newspapers archive at <http://digitalnewspapers.org/>, or at the Utah Pioneer Library, <http://pioneer.utah.gov/>
 - a. Small town newspapers--These are generally weekly newspapers. Information about the construction of major buildings in the community--schools, churches, public buildings, commercial buildings--usually appears on the front page. References to the construction of houses are often found in the "local" column.
 - b. Large city newspapers--Daily newspapers, such as the Deseret News and the Salt Lake Tribune, usually have a real estate section in which most of the important construction news appears. Information about

the construction of individual houses is also given, though not on a consistent or complete basis. Advertisements in this section by builders and real estate firms are also useful sources of information, often highlighting recently completed buildings.

- c. Annual "List of Buildings" for Salt Lake City--These appear in the January 1st issue of the Salt Lake Tribune from 1889 until 1899. The lists give the location, cost, brief description, and name of the owner of each building constructed during the previous year.
 - d. "List of Buildings" for Ogden--This list is the same as that described above for Salt Lake City. However, it appears only one time--Salt Lake Tribune, January 1, 1892, p. 39 (for buildings constructed in 1891).
6. **Architects File** (Historic Preservation Office)--Information about many of the architects and builders in Utah are included in this file along with lists of some of the buildings they designed or constructed. Architectural drawings of historic buildings are extremely rare since most houses were not individually designed by formally schooled architects. Even the works of many of Utah's prominent architects are unavailable. The best collection of historic architectural drawings is at the U of U Marriott Library Special Collections. These are organized under each architect's name, so you must determine who the architect of your house is before you begin searching for specific drawings. The Research Center also has a few architectural drawings (check with Research Center staff).
7. **Biographical information** on owners can be found in the following sources:
- a. City directories (larger cities only)--These annual listings provide the names, addresses and occupations of everyone in the city. They are arranged in alphabetical order by name in the earlier years, but from 1924 on properties are listed by both occupant name and address. Directories are useful in verifying when a house was built and whether the owner lived in it himself or rented it out (Research Center and other libraries).
 - b. State gazetteers--These annual volumes include virtually every community in the state, but unlike city directories they usually list only those who are involved with business enterprises and they do not give addresses.
 - c. Biographical index--Arranged alphabetically by name, this card catalog gives specific references for names found in publications at the Research Center.
 - d. "Mormons and Their Neighbors"--a two volume reference set that provides names and in what biographical/historical references information for them is found.
 - e. Biographical encyclopedias such as "Pioneers and Prominent Men," "Utah's Distinguished Personalities," etc. (Research Center and other libraries).
 - f. Genealogical records (LDS Church Family History Library), also available online at websites such as <http://www.familysearch.org>, or <http://landing.ancestry.com>.
 - g. Census schedules (available on microfilm at the Research Center, university and genealogical libraries, and online at various websites)--These list the members of each household, their ages, occupations, places of birth etc. In some later census schedules the address of each household may also be given. Census schedules are arranged by county and city and are available for each decade from 1850 to 1940 (1890 excluded).
 - h. Family histories--Written histories, journals, letters, photographs, etc. are sometimes available from family members. Verbal accounts from the family and others associated with the property are also often useful.
 - i. Obituary Index (available on microfilm at Research Center, university and genealogical libraries)--Indexes obituaries in the Salt Lake Tribune and the Deseret News from 1850 to 1970. The Salt Lake Tribune is also indexed separately from 1941 to 1991.
 - j. Local histories--community and LDS ward histories may contain information about early settlers or prominent community members.