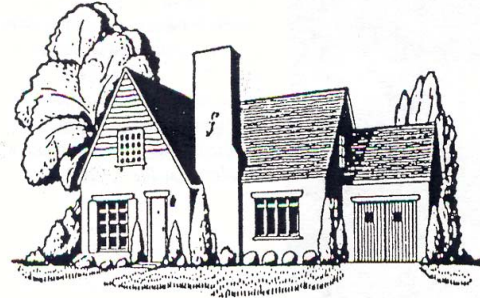


## Researching the History of Your House

If you happen to be 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 Colorado History Museum, 1300 Broadway, Denver. As the administrators of the Colorado Inventory of Cultural Resources, they have information on some 90,000 sites throughout Colorado and your property may be included. The Society's Stephen Hart Library 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 Hart 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 Hart Library, the Denver Public Library and the Norlin Library on the Boulder campus of the University of Colorado, and also available 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 which 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 are your neighbors. 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 and the Denver Public Library have building history search guides keyed to their collections. OAHP has the same guides as well as the National Register Bulletin "Researching a Historic Property." These guides may be obtained by writing or calling the various institutions.

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



# CHECKLIST

## SEARCH STRATEGY FOR DENVER BUILDINGS

### DENVER PUBLIC LIBRARY WESTERN HISTORY/GENEALOGY DEPARTMENT

10 W. 14th Avenue  
Denver, CO 80203  
720-865-1821

#### 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

#### 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 blockbooks
- \_\_\_ Denver. Buildings

#### Photographs

- \_\_\_ Denver. Residences
- \_\_\_ Denver. Streets
- \_\_\_ Denver. Buildings (by name)

#### Newspapers

- \_\_\_ Neighborhood newspapers

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### OTHER DPL DEPARTMENTS

#### Documents Division

- \_\_\_ Boiler permits 1915-1955

#### Genealogy

- \_\_\_ Federal census 1860-1880
- \_\_\_ Colorado census 1885

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

**COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

1300 Broadway  
Denver, CO 80202  
303-866-3392

[www.coloradohistory-oahp.org](http://www.coloradohistory-oahp.org)

Site Files Database

- \_\_\_ Inventory form on property
- \_\_\_ National or State Register nomination forms

Report Library

- \_\_\_ Survey reports and contexts

Reference Library

- \_\_\_ Colorado style books

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**COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
STEPHEN H. HART LIBRARY**

1300 Broadway  
Denver, CO 80202  
303-866-2305

[www.coloradohistory.org](http://www.coloradohistory.org)

Library Catalog (available online -CHS 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 wasn't 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 CHS website)

\_\_\_ Robinson - 1887

\_\_\_ Baist - 1905

Census Records

\_\_\_ Colorado Federal 1860-1930

\_\_\_ State 1885

Manuscripts

\_\_\_ Architects

\_\_\_ Denver. Residences

\_\_\_ Denver. Buildings

\_\_\_ MSS Index

Maps

City maps, street maps

Photographs (photo collection indexes on CHS website)

\_\_\_ Denver. Residences

\_\_\_ Denver. Streets

\_\_\_ Denver. Buildings (by name)

Newspapers

\_\_\_ Town & Neighborhood newspapers

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Online resources:

Digital newspapers: <http://cdpheritage.org>  
searchable database of early Colorado newspapers online.

Photographs: <http://photoswest.org>

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

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

**STATE ARCHIVES**

1313 Sherman Street, Room 1B-20  
Denver, CO 80203  
303-866-2358  
[www.colorado.gov/dpa/doit/archives/](http://www.colorado.gov/dpa/doit/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
- \_\_\_ Photographs of public buildings and officials
- \_\_\_ Territorial legislative records
- \_\_\_ Court records
- \_\_\_ Water rights records

**CLERK AND RECORDER OFFICE**

Wellington E. Webb  
Municipal Office Building Department 101  
201 W. Colfax Ave.  
Denver, CO 80202  
[720-865-5400](tel: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  
[www.denvergov.com/Historic\\_Preservation/4205166template3jump.asp](http://www.denvergov.com/Historic_Preservation/4205166template3jump.asp)

- \_\_\_ Denver Landmarks and districts

**DENVER WATER DEPARTMENT**

1600 W. 12th Avenue  
Denver, CO 80204  
[303-628-6000](tel: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  
[www.denvergov.org/treasurypt/PropertyTax.asp](http://www.denvergov.org/treasurypt/PropertyTax.asp)

- \_\_\_ 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

**PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT DESIGN ENGINEERING DIVISION**

Wellington E. Webb  
Municipal Office Building  
Department 608  
201 W. Colfax Ave.  
Denver, CO 80202  
[720-865-8630](tel: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 Histories page at <http://photoswest.org/exhib/buildings/intro.htm>. This may also be accessed directly through the Library's home page at <http://denverlibrary.org> by clicking on Western History & Genealogy and then on 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 <http://denvergov.org/realproperty.asp>.

**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.

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.

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.

## **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)

Lists occupation and residence address.

## **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://photoswest.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.

**CARL** (On-line catalog) <<http://denverlibrary.org/>>.

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

(3/2005)