Frequently Asked Questions, continued

How do I find the original owner of my house and the date of construction?

There are several sources that can be used to find this information. The best and most accurate source are tax assessment rolls. However, they are difficult and time consuming records to use. If your house was built after 1900, obtaining a copy of your plumbing plan from the Permits and Inspections Department will give you the date that the house was connected to the sewer system - likely the same year the house was built. The document will also have the name of the owner at that time. City directories can also be helpful in narrowing down the date (if other sources are not available) and will help you determine who lived in your house over the years. Contact Permits & Inspections at 250.361.0342 or permits@victoria.ca.

Who was the architect or builder of my house?

Finding out this information can be difficult. Prior to 1907, the City did not require that building plans be submitted, and plans are one of the few sources that document the architect or builder’s name. You can request a search for house plans by contacting Permits and Inspections at 250-361-0342. Building permits were occasionally signed by the architect, builder, or contractor. As a last resort, try the newspapers. At the beginning of each year, they published a list of buildings built in the previous twelve months. Architect-designed homes were often singled out for special mention. Historical newspapers are available on microfilm at the Greater Victoria Public Library and online (British Coloo- nist only) at: www.britishcolonist.ca.

Where can I find a photograph of my house?

The Archives has a large photograph collection from a variety of sources. While the Archives may have a photo of your house or street, we do not have images of every home in the city. Search photos at archives.victoria.ca. If you do not have any luck here, try the BC Archives or the Hallmark Society.

Additional Resources

BC Archives
655 Belleville Street, 250.387.1952

Esquimalt Archives
1149 A Esquimalt Road, 250.412.8540

Oak Bay Archives
2167 Oak Bay Avenue, 250.592.3290

Saanich Archives
3100 Tillicum Road, 250.475.1775

Sidney Museum & Archives
2423 Beacon Avenue, 250.655.6355

View Royal Archives
45 View Royal Avenue, 250.479.6800

Hallmark Society
15-1594 Fairfield Road, 250.382.4755

Visit the Archives
8 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC
(Across the Square from City Hall)

10:00 am-3:00 pm, Monday to Thursday
10:00 am-12:00 pm and 1:00 pm-3:00 pm, Fridays
Phone: 250.361.0375
Fax: 250.361.0367
Email: archives@victoria.ca
Website: www.victoria.ca/archives
This brochure describes tools available for house and building research at the Archives, and how you can use them.

City Directories
1860-1999

For the house researcher, the city directories are a good place to start. They will provide an idea of what type of building was at a particular address (i.e. residence or business). The directories can also provide a rough idea of the age of a building, by the date the address first appears in the directories. The earliest directories list residents (not necessarily owners) in the city and environs, and include their address and occupation. It wasn’t until the 1890s that another section listing streets was added. Some directories cover only the city, others cover Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia. BC-related directories for the years 1860-1955 can be found online through the Vancouver Public Library: bccd.vpl.ca.

Maps and Plans

Fire insurance plans and lot maps can be used for researching property. Fire insurance plans show street numbers, position of building on the lot, construction material used for each building, number of storeys, and locations of out buildings. Early plans are available online through the University of Victoria Library. Lot maps can be used to trace the growth of the city and to determine the legal description of a property.

Demolished Building Plans

Building plans and applications for plumbing connections for demolished buildings are held by the Archives. These are useful tools for researching architects as well as homes, buildings, and businesses that have been demolished. Applications for plumbing connections will confirm the date a building was plumbed and the date it was demolished. For plans of extant buildings, contact the City’s Permits and Inspections Department: 250.361.0342

Building Permit Applications
1907-1989

Building permit applications are arranged by building permit number. They may be useful for establishing an approximate date of construction. In addition, the owner’s name, legal description, number of storeys and rooms are recorded.

Tax Assessment Rolls
1864-1948

Tax assessment records may be useful if you need to establish ownership of a property or the construction dates of a building. These records show lot size, name of owner, land value, and improvements to the land (i.e. house).

Photographs

The Archives has an extensive photograph collection from a variety of sources. You can browse the scanned images from our collection through the Archives’ Online Search: archives.victoria.ca.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the Archives have a complete history of my house already prepared?

If your house is a designated heritage building, a history of it may already be available in the Planning Department, since applications for designation generally require a history. Otherwise, Archives staff will be more than willing to discuss the sources available to you and guide you through the research process.

Keep in mind the following:

- Street numbers changed in 1907
- Street names changed often