

Researching Your Home at Evanston History Center

Tracing your house's history can seem like a daunting task. With a little creativity and perseverance (and a visit to the EHC archives) you too can discover the story of your historic Evanston home.

Where do I start?

You may be wondering where to start on a house history project, especially if you live in an old home with several previous owners. EHC has resources and staff to help you with this. The first thing you will likely do is construct a timeline of when your house was built and what renovations and changes were made after that. You may also want to keep a list of owners, builders, and architects associated with your house so you can find out more about them later.

EHC's Research Room and Archives is open from 1-4 pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Staff is available at those times to answer any questions you might have. There is a \$5 research fee; students and EHC members are free. When you arrive at the Research Room, we will ask that you fill out a brief registration card. You are welcome to take notes in pencil, and there is a photocopier available for your use. Copies are \$.25 for 8.5x11 pages and \$.50 for legal and 11x17 pages.

What is available at EHC's Archives and Research Room?

EHC has a variety of resources related to homes in Evanston and Evanston history in general. Listed here are some of the most widely used.

- *House cards.* For many (but not all) of the addresses with house files, EHC also has index cards with basic information noted by other researchers.
- *House files.* EHC maintains files on many of the homes in Evanston. They are filed by address and contain items such as building permits, inspection reports, and zoning reviews. Material in the files spans the years 1893-1980. Documents from after 1980 are held at City Hall. These files are likely to be the most useful resource for your research.
- *National Register materials.* Many homes in Evanston are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and EHC has documentation related to the nomination process. You may be able to find information about important dates, builders, and architects in these documents.
- *Photographs and blueprints.* EHC has a limited number of photographs and blueprints for homes in the city. They do not exist for every home.
- *City Directories.* City directories can be a valuable resource for finding out who lived in your home at a given time. Information is organized alphabetically by name and may help you to confirm dates of residency and indicate other residents who may have lived in your home.
- *Sanborn maps.* These are maps produced by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. They are useful for showing how neighborhoods were laid out at a given point in time.
- *Biographical files, clipping files, and archival collections.* EHC offers many resources to learn more about Evanston and the people who may have lived in or worked on your home.

What might I find in my house file at EHC?

EHC's house files contain several different types of documents. Some will give you a wealth of information about your house; others will tell you less.

- *Original building permits.* You may find permits for not only the original construction of your home, but also for and additions that were made over the years. You will usually find a description of what the permit was issued for right below the date the permit was issued. (See attached sample permits.) Building permits may indicate any or all of the following: construction dates, architects and builders involved, amounts and prices of materials used, and homeowners' names.
- *Inspection reports and zoning review board documents.* Inspection reports may provide information about whether a property met building codes and about what steps were taken to correct any violations. Zoning review documents may indicate whether a property's use has changed over the years (going from a single-family dwelling to a multi-unit building, for example). Most importantly, however, these documents may help you figure out who owned your home on the date they were issued.
- *Tax documents.* These documents may provide information about a property's value at a given time.

Where else can I find information about my house?

You can find permits and city forms related to your home after 1980 at City Hall. Evanston Public Library also holds some city directories and clippings files. Documents related to your home's title history are held at the Cook County Assessor's office in downtown Chicago.