How to Research Your Home

By Sara Fisher

As the year 2020 quickly approaches, many of the houses in Lakewood will be 100 years old or older. Over the course of the past number of years, the Lakewood Historical Society has received countless inquiries about researching the history of the houses our community members call home. While on some occasions, community members commission the Lakewood Historical Society to conduct such historical research, many opt to research for themselves. It is for this reason that we want to provide those historically minded researchers with a guide to conducting your house history.

To research a house history requires a great deal of work and, at times, mystery solving. But, to research the information on your house yourself provides a great deal of enjoyment and pride in the house you call your home.

Here are the steps to take to find out your beautiful house's history. Thank you to the Cuyahoga County Archives, Lakewood Building Department, the Lakewood Historical Society, Marcia Moll and Rick Sicha, and other researchers with the Lakewood Historical Society for the compilation of notes on how to conduct such a research project.

Getting Started

The Lakewood Historical Society maintains a few Plat Books in our collection which contain some information about many properties in Lakewood and their previous owners. There are other resources that will be discussed later for more information.

The first step you will need to take is to establish the ownership history. For this, you will need to have:

- 1. The deed, mortgage, appraisal, or tax duplicate →these will include the **Parcel Number** for your property.
 - a. This is a 3-part number. Ex. 312-15-009
 - b. The 1st number = The Plat Book you are looking for
 - c. The 2^{nd} number = the page number
 - d. The 3rd number = the line on the corresponding page. *This number will match the circled number on the map.
- 2. If you do not have the **Parcel Number**, you can go to the Cuyahoga County website and search "Property Information."
 - a. www.cuyahogacounty.us

- b. On the right hand side of the page, select "Property Information"
- c. Select "Online Property Search." Here you will be able to search by the address, last name, etc.
- 3. Once you have the **Parcel Number**, you will then go to the Lakewood Historical Society or the Cuyahoga County Archives to view the **Plat Books**. The Plat Books represent a certain span of years. For instance, some will represent 1920-1930, 1900-1910, 1940-1950, etc. Please note, however, that the Cuyahoga County Archives are in the process of moving to a new location which began in the summer of 2016 through 2017. The best way to get in contact with the Cuyahoga County Archives is to email archive@cuyahogacounty.us.
 - a. The Plat Books provide information about the transfer of ownership for the property in question and give a glimpse into some of the previous ownership history. To search in the Plat Books, you will use the 3-part number for the book (from the example above: 312), page number (15), and the line on the corresponding page (009). Here you will see the transfer history for the years represented in the Plat Book. Be aware that the one Plat Book does not represent the entire property's ownership and transfer history. You will need to look at other years to get ownership history. In some cases, you will need to search on the **General Database Search** feature on the county's website.
- 4. To search the **General Database** for information on specifics for ownership transfer;
 - a. Go to www.cuyahogacounty.us and on the right-hand side of the home page, select "Deed Search."
 - b. Then, go to the toggle bar on the left side of the page and under "Search Database", select "General Search."
 (http://recorder.cuyahogacounty.us/searchs/generalsearchs.aspx)
 This will provide you with fields to fill in with what information you have. It is easier to search the last name of one of the previous owners you noted from the Plat Books and then enter the date range for roughly 10-15 years.
 - i. Example: You will select the range: 1/1/1941 to 12/31/1951
 - 1. Then you enter the owner's name that you know for that time period. This will give you some of the necessary information about *when* the property was transferred, *to whom*, and sometimes, *for how much*.
 - c. When you are searching on the database, you will come across the AFN Number. This number was assigned when the documents were processed by the Auditor's office. Each deed has a unique identifying

number for processing. The AFN is a 12-digit number that shows the year, month, day, and document processed that day.

- i. Example: 20160818006
 - 1. **2016**0518006 \rightarrow The year 2016
 - 2. $20160518006 \rightarrow \text{The month}$
 - 3. 201605**18**006 \rightarrow The day of the month
 - 4. 20160518**006**→ The number of the document processed that day.
- ii. You will click on the AFN number to view the basic information. To see a copy of the Deed or other search result, select "View Image." This will open into a new window where you will see a copy of the Deed or other result. It will show who was the selling body, or individual, of the property and provide you with more information to continue searching.
- 5. When you have determined previous ownership history, you should make sure to note the owners' names in chronological order with the most recent first.
 - a. Example: 8/18/2016 John Doe; 5/12/2000 Jane Smith; etc.)

When searching on the database, make sure to be cognizant of spelling and capitalization. If there are no results, broaden or shorten your date range and double check spelling.

Construction Date

Another aspect to conducting a house history is to determine the construction date. To find this information, there are a variety of resources at your disposal. First you will want to contact the **Cuyahoga County Archives** (archive@cuyahogacounty.us) or by calling 216.443.7250. An email inquiry will be the best method of communicating with them since as of summer 2016 they are moving to a new building. You will be able to get a copy of the **tax duplicates** and/or the **property re-appraisal information**. For homes built after 1910 in Lakewood, you should contact the **Lakewood Building Department** (216.529.6278) to look at building permits. This will provide you with information about the contractor, architect, materials used, etc.

<u>Further Resources</u>

The **Lakewood Historical Society** (216.221.7343 or museum@lakewoodhistory.org) has a number of Plat Books that researchers are welcome to schedule an appointment to look through. Additionally, the **Lakewood Public Library** (216.226.8275) has a larger collection of these Plat Books as well as a more complete set of the City Directories. The directories provide information about the people who

once owned your house, such as what he or she did for an occupation. You can also research old newspapers by utilizing the resources at the **Cleveland Public Library** (www.cpl.com). They have the "Cleveland Plain Dealer" online and digitized and will be a great resource for further research. Another resource that you can search are the **Sanborn Fire Insurance maps**. This is especially helpful for buildings that were businesses at one point and the Lakewood Historical Society has a link on our website to access these online tools: www.lakewoodhsitory.org/research.

If you are looking for images of your home, you can look at the **Cleveland Memory Project's Yesterday's Lakewood** page

(www.clevelandmemory.com/Lakewood). This is an online searchable database of images that have been contributed by the Lakewood Historical Society, the City of Lakewood, and other entities to provide a visual history of our community. Other resources include **U.S. Census** (www.archives.gov) records, the **Western Reserve Historical Society** (www.wrhs.org), and the **Cleveland State University Library** (216.687.3529). Additionally, you should take a look at the structure of your home because it can provide clues to previous renovations and other structural work. This can provide a slew of information!

Embarking on a house history research project can, at times, be a daunting task. But, remember that the Lakewood Historical Society is a resource here to help you achieve your researching goals. If you are strapped on time to research your house history, consider submitting a Research Request (located on our website) and we will be happy to do some research for you for a small fee.

Is your home 100 years old? If so, you should consider purchasing a Centennial Plaque to display on your home! More information is available on our website: www.lakewoodhistory.org/CentennialPlaque.html

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