

How to Research Your Building in Lakewood

City of Lakewood Heritage Advisory Board and the Lakewood Historical Society

May 2025 – Marcia Moll and Rick Sicha

First steps: Building Permit and List of Owners

Knowing when the building was constructed and who has owned it over the decades will make other research easier.

Building Permit

Building permits are in the Building Department in the basement of Lakewood City Hall. Building permits start in about 1905.

Call the City of Lakewood Housing & Building Department (216.529.6270). Provide the address and arrange at time to go to the Building Department to look the records on their microfiche machine. Microfiche are miniature versions of documents printed onto small sheets of clear film. The oldest sheets for your property have no date in the upper right corner. Use a smartphone to take pictures of the image on the screen: The original permits (usually narrow and long in shape), the Permit Record card (which has the shape of a large index card), plus other permits such as additions, major bathroom or kitchen remodeling, new garage, etc.

List of Owners

First, find the Parcel Number (same as Parcel ID). All Lakewood parcel numbers are in this format 31x-xx-xxx. The parcel number is on a property tax bill, a reappraisal notice, or can be found on the Cuyahoga County website MyPlace homepage: <https://myplace.cuyahogacounty.us> Search for your property by owner name or address.

The goal is to create a list of every owner from today back to when the real estate company or person first sold the lot. Be sure to record spouses as well. The information to collect is the date the deed was recorded and the name of the person or persons who bought the property. It can be written out like this:

Date Deed

Recorded

Owner

10-30-2009 Eliza Doolittle

07-15-2004 John and Anna Bates

Researching deeds from January 1, 1975 through today

At the Cuyahoga County webpage MyPlace home page: <https://myplace.cuyahogacounty.us> find your property, as described above.

On the left side of the screen, click Transfers. Click on each date entry under Transfer History. Record the date, grantee (who bought the property), and grantor (who sold the property).

The earliest transfer will be dated 01/01/1975. That is who owned the property on January 1, 1975.

Also on the left side of the screen, click General Information. Under Description, record the information, which is an abbreviated version of the legal description of the property, such as 23 Smith S/L 001 all & 002 EP. This translates to Old Section 23 (meaning a geographic section of Lakewood), Smith Subdivision, Sublot 1 (all of it) plus the east part of Sublot 2. This information will be helpful in looking at old deeds to make sure it matches the property being researched.

Researching deeds before January 1, 1975

First method: research using paper records.

The Cuyahoga County Archives, 3951 Perkins Ave., has oversize map books that contain owner names from the 1940s and earlier. The staff will show you how to use them. Take your parcel number. Archives: 216-443-7520.

To find owner names from the 1940s until 1975, use City Directories (discussed below) or visit the Cuyahoga County Administrative Headquarters, 2079 East 9th St., 4th floor, Map Room. They have oversize parcel books that the staff will show you how to use. Take your parcel number.

Another option is to use City Directories to find owners from January 1, 1975 back to 1929 (discussed below). City Directories show occupants, so if the property was a rental, the City Directory will show the renters, not the owner, because that person lived somewhere else).

Second method: research online.

Go to the Cuyahoga County webpage <https://cuyahoga.oh.publicsearch.us>

Enter the name found under the January 1, 1975 in this format Doolittle Eliza Adjust the Date Range if you wish. Click the magnifying glass icon.

Under 'Doc Type,' results will most often read 'Deed.' There will also be items labeled such as 'Mortgage' or 'Release.' One of the columns on the far right is 'Property Address.' That column will sometimes have street names, which will help locate a specific property.

The results are in date order (If they are not in date order, click 'Recorded Date' at the top of the column. The dates can be put in ascending or descending order).

Click on an item marked 'Deed' and that has the owner's name being researched. A small image of the original deed will appear on the left side. Click the blue button marked 'Download (Free)' to save. On the right side of the screen, the 'Recorded Date' of the deed is noted. Be sure to record it. Below the word 'Parties' will be the names of the buyer and seller. The seller is the 'grantor,' and the buyer is the 'grantee.' Click the name listed as the grantee. That will return items for that person. Repeat the search steps.

It may be necessary to click on a number of records to find your property, especially if the owner had a common name. Use the deed legal description and compare it to the one being viewed. Remember that deed recordings often involve family members with the same last name due to marriage, divorce,

or death. If too many records appear due to a popular name or a person bought and sold many properties, use the far left column to search by decade.

Deeds rarely give selling prices. They often say for the “consideration of ten dollars.”

The first deed when the real estate company or person sold the lot can be interesting. It may list how much the buyer paid for the lot, along with information such as required setbacks, minimum cost for the new house, or prohibited uses for the lot such as the manufacture or sale of “spirituous liquors.”

Next steps: Filling in the details

Now that the list of owners is complete, information can be gathered to tell their stories. Concentrate on information during the time a person was associated with the building. There is no need to compile a lifelong biography of every person. File organizing hint: create a folder for each owner’s last name, into which electronic files or paper records can be placed.

City Directories

City directories are annual volumes of alphabetical lists of names, along with a person’s street address and often their occupation.

Starting research in a city directory a year or two before a person bought a home will provide their previous residence. If a last name is not too common, look through all the listings to see if any other relatives are listed. There might be other relatives, or a son or daughter who is a “student” or has their own job.

If a person’s listing shows an employer’s name, the business can be looked up to learn their location and line of business.

Bound volumes of city directories are located at the Lakewood Public Library, 2nd floor, reference area. Cleveland city directories start in the mid-19th century and continue into the 1970’s. An index by address was added in each volume starting in 1929. The Cleveland city directories include Lakewood, until a separate Lakewood city directory was published from the late 1940’s into the early 1960’s. In the 1970s, Lakewood listings are located in the Cleveland West Suburban directories. Most of these City directories are also on Ancestry.com.

The Plain Dealer online archives

This online database is available through the Cleveland Public Library’s website and the Cuyahoga County Public Library website. Remote research requires a library card for access.

Cleveland Public Library

Go to: <https://cpl.org/research-learning/researchdatabases/>

Select the Research tab and choose By Topic. Scroll down the page to the Genealogy heading. Scroll down to Plain Dealer Historical (1845 – 1991). Click on the entry and enter library card number and pin.

Searching can be on any word or words. Exact phrases can be put in quotes. One possible search is address “12345 Lake” (leave off Ave., St. Dr., etc). Another search is an owner’s name. Search on a man’s name, because in the Society pages women were often listed as ‘Mrs. John Bates.’ Searching

“John Bates” might catch entries for the husband and wife. Searching John Bates without the quotation marks may catch entries where a middle initial was used (the proximity of the two words makes it work).

An article can be saved using the screen capture function of your computer, or download a PDF. File naming hint: organize the files using the publication date, such as –

PD 1923 12 29 pg 7_Doolittle family reference with photo
(or Doolittle business reference, or Doolittle travel reference, or Doolittle Eliza obituary, etc).

Cuyahoga County Public Library

Go to: <https://cuyahogalibrary.org>

Click on the Research & Discover tab. In the Resources A-Z column, click Plain Dealer & Local News. Scroll down to Plain Dealer, The (Cleveland, Ohio). Click Access Resource. Enter library card number and pin. Researching is the same as for the Cleveland Public Library entry above.

Census Records

Once property owners are known, names can be researched in Census records. The U.S. Census has been taken every ten years since 1790. Most 1890 Census records were destroyed in a fire. Census records can be accessed at several websites, such as familysearch.org. [Ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) can be accessed inside the Lakewood Public Library, Cleveland Public Library branches, and Cuyahoga County Library branches.

[Ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) has sets of records that include U.S. Census, marriage licenses, military service, death records, city directories, passenger lists for immigration, and passenger lists for overseas travel by Americans.

Cuyahoga County Archives – Appraisal Cards

The archive has Real Estate Appraisal Cards from the mid-20th century (most often 1944, 1952/53, and 1964). Some appraisals may include a small photo of the home. The Cards are large index cards that record the value and characteristics of a property, such as building dimensions, roof material, and bathroom or kitchen tilework. One or more purchase prices may also be noted.

Photograph the appraisal card, or as staff to make copies.

The Archive is not open every day. Call in advance, tell them you want to look at the Appraisal Cards and any photos, and give the Parcel Number. They can retrieve the material and have it ready for you when you come in. 216.443.7250. <https://cuyahogacounty.gov/publicworks/archives>

Cleveland Public Library Necrology file and News Index online database

The Cleveland Public Library has an online database of many death notices from local newspapers, dating from the 19th century to the present day. This information is free-of-charge on the Internet (a library card is not needed). <https://cpl.org/newsindex/>

Enter the last name and click Search. To get fewer results, enter last name and then the first name or first initial. An address can also be searched, such as “12345 Lake.” Death notices sometimes listed the person’s most recent address.