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Researching the History of a House in Douglas County

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

1. Things to consider

- age of building
- style
- additions to original building
- where is it located? near an older business area? on the outskirts of the original townsite?
- history of the area
- origin of the people who settled in the area
- does your house fit into the general style of the neighborhood or was it built earlier or later than the rest of the buildings?

2. There are several ways to approach your research. Some suggestions are listed below, with location of resources noted. The information included provides local resources for the information in the booklet "House History Checklist."

OBTAINING A LEGAL DESCRIPTION OF LAND AND A COPY OF THE DEED

The state of Kansas indexes land records by a legal description, which includes township section and range number if a rural area, or addition, block and lot number if in town.

To obtain legal description and copy of deed:

Call or visit the Register of Deeds office at the Douglas County Courthouse, 1100 Massachusetts [832-5282]. They will provide a legal description for you after locating your home on a plat map. They also will give you a copy of the deed, if you own the property, or will sell you a copy if you do not own the property in question.

The deed provides information on transfer of the land and may include some biographical history on the people who lived there.

DETERMINING THE CONSTRUCTION DATE OF THE HOUSE

Property Title Abstracts

Title Abstracts are copied directly from the deed
Abstracts provide information on transfer of the land and may include some biographical history on the people who purchased the property.
You will need to locate your property from a plat map to obtain a legal description with city addition, block and lot number; this may be done by calling the Register of Deeds, Douglas County Courthouse [832-5282].

Numerous Title Abstracts are located at:

Watkins Community Museum of History
1047 Massachusetts
841-4109

Title Companies may keep abstracts and often will make copies

Tax Assessment Rolls

Published annually, these may provide construction date clues - a jump in property tax from one year to the next will indicate that a building was constructed on the land.

Located at: Spencer Research Library - Kansas Collection
Kansas University
(785) 864-4334

Kansas State Historical Society and History Center
6425 SW 6th
Topeka, KS
(785) 272-8681

Building Permits

These document new buildings or additions and may list details about construction, type of materials, owner
May be arranged by address, usually arranged chronologically by filing date, so may be difficult to use

Located at: Douglas County Building Inspection Office
2108 W. 27th
(785) 331-1343

Records date from 1960s to present

Mechanic's Lien

These were not legally required, but many companies used them as security for payment.

Sometimes provide great detail about construction or additions

Located at: Douglas County Courthouse, Clerk of the District Court

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

Produced to appraise fire insurance rates for businesses from 1883-1967

Feature business districts and whatever houses were in the area

Original maps in color to indicate materials used in building's construction

Provide an idea of the business life and activity of an area; also additions to buildings over the years

Limitations: if building not in the business area at the time, it will not be shown

Sanborn fire insurance maps for Kansas are available online at LPL's website with your LPL library card:

<http://www.lawrence.lib.ks.us/research/index.html> (scroll down to *Genealogy*)

Print copies located at:

Watkins Community Museum of History (1927 only)

Kansas Collection Spencer Library (more complete collection)

Kansas State Historical Society (large collection)

Plats and Maps

Original plats filed upon incorporation may include houses present in the city at the time.

Located at: Douglas County Courthouse, Register of Deeds

Aerial photographs

Published in local newspapers

Provide dates, picture of building and area, construction changes

Located at: Kansas State Historical Society has a very large collection from around the state. Phone: (785) 272-8681

Atlas of Kansas, Evert Publishing Co.

Contains older city maps, plat maps that may note names of owners on map

Located at: Lawrence Public Library Helen Osma Collection KC912.781 L 1982

Newspapers

Most small towns published daily or weekly newspapers. Kansas has more than any other state!

Often give useful comments that establish when a home was built, destroyed, or rebuilt

Later newspapers include photographs
Located at: Lawrence Public Library Helen Osma Collection – copies of various
Lawrence newspapers dating from 1854 to present on microfilm

City Directories

Usually published annually or bi-annually
May be cross-referenced by name and by address
Excellent way to discover when an address for a building begins
May provide business history
Older directories provide biographical information: might list profession, if
widowed, an ethnic group, etc.

Located at: Lawrence Public Library, Osma Collection: 1860 – 1930s; 1960 - present

Watkins Community Museum of History: same as above, plus some
1930s; all 1950s and the *1930 Colored Directory*

Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka

Rural Directories

Located at: Lawrence Public Library Helen Osma Collection: Douglas County
Directories, 1949; 1972; 1975; 1977

Watkins Community Museum of History: *1920 Farmers Mail
Directory*

Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka

Estate Records

Wills and probate case files may provide inventory and appraisals of property
These are public record if the will is contested - filed in probate cases
Located at: Douglas County Court House, Clerk of the District Court

Kansas Inspection Bureau booklets

Give detailed information about businesses in Kansas towns
Produced 1890-1944
Located at: Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka

Kansas Census Rolls

Published every 5 years
Located at: Lawrence Public Library Helen Osma Collection
Microfilm: Kansas Territory, Kansas State, Douglas County
1855-1925
Anschutz Library, Government Documents area, Kansas University
Microfilm 1855 Territorial -- 1920 Federal
-- 1925 State
Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka

History of the State of Kansas, A.T. Andreas, 1883

Provides good background information of an area, businesses, owners

Located at: Lawrence Public Library Helen Osma Collection KC 978.1 ANDREAS
2 vols.

Records of County Appraisers

May provide date of construction

These may contain photographs of your area and building

Located at: Douglas County Courthouse

Site Files

These files of buildings include photographs, news clippings, biographical and historical information on owners and buildings

Usually for well-known or historic buildings, but may be donated by

"ordinary folks" or families who have done research on their property.

Located at: Watkins Community Museum of History

Oral histories

Talk with neighbors or people who once lived in your area.

Physical examination

Physical traits of materials used can give evidence of age, history

Shape of nails, type of glass, wood framing, quality of wood, other materials used

Additions? Artifacts discovered around the area?

Additional research

Learn about the history of your area – city, township, county

This can provide good clues about your home and its origin and owners

Located at: Helen Osma Collection: Books and newspaper clippings

Watkins Community Museum of History

Spencer Library, Kansas University

Kansas State Historical Society

BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH ON THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN YOUR HOME

See the Resources noted above

Many of these may give useful information about who lived at this address

Vital Statistics

Births, marriages, deaths, cemetery records

Located at: Lawrence Public Library Osma Room – See: *Osma Room Index of Resources*, Index Shelf

Additional Information

Once you have located the names, search local museums for letters, diaries, business records, manuscripts

Located at: Kansas Collection – Spencer Library
Watkins Community Museum of History
Kansas State Historical Society Manuscript Collection

NOTE:

The Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka
is a valuable resource for all types of research on this topic.
Consult its website at www.kshs.org