

How to Research the History of Your Home: A Resource Guide

Researching the history of your home can be a fun and rewarding experience whether your purpose is to share the information with family and friends, nominate your home for the Register of Historic Places, document local or family history or for your own personal satisfaction.

This Resource Guide will address some of the questions you may have such as:

What types of information do I need to start my research?

Where to start?

Where can I find information about my property and neighborhood, such as who designed, constructed my home?

How do I keep track of/organize my research?

Why consider nominating my property to the state or national register?

What are uncommon sources of information that might prove helpful?

In researching a historic residence, your goal is to find out what it was like originally and this may include learning more about the surrounding neighborhood, too.

You want to find out:

Who built the house and when?

What did the house originally look like—inside and out?

Who owned and lived in it?

What were the cultural forces at work when the house was built?

What changes have been made and when?

This Guide lists resources and tips that can help.

GOOGLE, WEBSITES, CITY DIRECTORIES, PHONE BOOKS, MAPS, NEWSPAPERS

These are a good place to start, especially since much of the searching can be done from your own computer.

The Hawai'i State Public Library has city directories through the end of the twentieth century. Directories list names and in the back, businesses.

Rely whenever possible on original sources and trusted historians, suspect all secondhand and thirdhand information (especially anything on social media) until you can verify it independently with accurate information.

Come up with a good organizing system before you amass much data. Create multiple folders and rename digital files for easy searching and retrieval. For example, if you put the date at the front of the file name in YEAR-MONTH-DAY format, everything will automatically sort chronologically. Also add keywords to the file name for quick searches across different folders.

ORAL HISTORY & CENSUS RECORDS

Interview neighbors, previous owners, or relatives of these families. Many of the historic homes in Hawaii were built during the first half of the twentieth century, so they are associated with people and communities which still are able to provide first-hand information.

Put together a list of names of people associated with the house, such as former neighbors, family friends, housekeepers, relatives, etc. An internet search may give you information to help locate some of these people. Some information they may be able to provide include colors of the house inside and out; type and placement of the furniture; uses of various rooms; and stories about its occupants. One of the most important things you may find are old photos of the house.

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND PERMITTING

To begin your research, you will need the residence's street address and Tax Map Key (TMK) number. You can find a residence's TMK number on the Real Property Tax Bill. Use the TMK number to find the permit history for your residence. Building permit records help you find the dates of alterations made to the house, the type of alterations, the name of the owners, name of the architect and builder, cost, floor plans that show the location of major fixtures, and types of materials.

In Honolulu, this information may be found on-line on the website for the Department of Planning and Permitting for the City & County of Honolulu:

<http://www.honoluludpp.org>

The Geographic Information System (GIS) option allows you to search either by address or TMK number. The zoning information will tell you if the residence is already on the "historic site register." *Building permits issued prior to January 1972, however, are not available on-line.* Copies of the building permits may be obtained by visiting the Data Access and Imaging Branch on the first floor of the Honolulu Municipal Building at 650 South King Street, tel. (808) 527-6743 or email info@honoluludpp.org.

COUNTY REAL PROPERTY TAX ASSESSEMENT OFFICE

A residence's real property tax records help you establish the "chain of title" history that shows who owned the residence and when ownership transfers occurred.

On the summary tax sheet for the residence, each transfer of ownership is recorded. On the same line as the transfer, there is a document number that will help you locate the deed book in which

a copy of the deed is kept. The next section will explain how to find the deed book at the State Bureau of Conveyances.

In Honolulu, a residence's tax records can be found at the City and County's Tax Assessment Office. This office houses the original field books containing residences' tax history. These original field books are no longer available, but they have been scanned and can be viewed by the public on-line at computer terminals in the computer room.

Property tax records for residences in Kauai, Maui, and Hawaii Island Counties can be researched by going to the county tax assessor's office to request information. Locations for the county tax assessment offices can be found at each of the county's homepages by using the links provided below.

While you are researching tax record information at the county tax office or on their website, request a copy of the tax map, which shows the boundaries of the property. This map will provide a useful basis on which to draw the site map of your residence, a required part of the nomination, should you decide to pursue historic designation for your property.

For Oahu County: Property records:

City and County of Honolulu Public Access (qpublic.net)

<https://www.realpropertyhonolulu.com/>

Honolulu GIS:

Honolulu Land Information System (HoLIS) - Department of Planning & Permitting - City & County of Honolulu (hcentral.com)

<https://www.honolulugis.org/>

For Hawaii Island County, residents can download TMK maps at:

<https://www.planning.hawaiicounty.gov/resources/tax-maps-tmk-maps/>

For Maui County, maps can be found at:

<https://www.mauicounty.gov/757/Tax-Map-Information/>

For Kauai County, the Real Property Assessment Office will provide individual plat maps, which may be ordered directly. Contact information can be found at:

www.kauai.gov/realproperty/

BASIC RESEARCH MATERIALS

Websites

Google.com - free

Findagrave.com – free

Ancestry.com – basic is \$25/month, advanced is \$450/year

nthp.org – National Trust for Historic Preservation

imagesofoldhawaii.com – Peter Young’s excellent collection of historical articles

gis.hicentral.com – Interactive GIS Web Map and Data Services, good for individual parcel data, TMK maps, building permit information.

City Directories

Years: 1871-1924 for O’ahu: 1869-to current some online and some on microfilm

Location: Honolulu Public Library, UH Manoa online

Format: hard copy and pdf

Contents: Listing by street address, alphabetical listing, business listing, business ads. Excellent resource for dating houses and locating notable residents. From 1908, use the street index to get names, then alphabetical listing to get full names and occupations. For 1907 and earlier you will have to work backwards by name (even though the house might be older, the trail stops cold if someone moves!). Be aware of street name changes, address inaccuracies and re-numberings.

Phone Books

Years: 1894 to 1928 (O’ahu) on microfiche with some years missing;

1929-1953 (Mutual Telephone Co.) (O’ahu) hard copy.

1954-1979 (Hawaiian Telephone Co.) (O’ahu) hard copy.

1980-2001 (GTE) (O’ahu) hard copy.

Library visit recommended to check for specific years.

Library also has directories for Hawai’i Island, Kaua’i, Moloka’i, Maui and Lāna’i.

Location: Honolulu Public Library

Format: microfiche, hardcopy

Contents: *names and addresses of those with telephone service. Issued semi-quarterly for earlier years. Good for fine-tuning dates from City Directories.*

Fire Insurance Maps

Years: 1879 (Lion),

1885, 1891, 1899, 1906 (Dakin)

1914, 1927, 1955 (Sanborn)

Location: Hawaii State Archives (1879 Lion, 1885 Dakin)

Bishop Museum (1879 Fireman's Fund)

UH Manoa (1891, 1899, 1896 Dakin) (1914, 1927, 1955 Sanborn)

Format: Hardcopy (Hawaii State Archives, Bishop Museum), free download (UH Manoa, <https://digital.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/collections/show/30>) (Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/maps/> search for Sanborn and city)

Contents: Shows building footprints including porches, number of stories, type of construction, addresses (including old addresses if renumbered). An excellent resource for researching districts. Remember that houses can move and change shape over time.

Miscellaneous Maps

Hawaii State Survey Division, DAGS

<http://ags.hawaii.gov/survey/map-search/>

for government survey maps and subdivision maps

Land Commission Awards (LCA)

The HSHK Knowledge Well - The HSHK Knowledge Well (oclc.org)

<https://hawaiinuiakea.contentdm.oclc.org/>

TMK Maps – Honolulu GIS

gis.hicentral.com

Good for identifying parcels, street names, subdivisions

The University of Hawaii Map Collection:

<https://guides.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/maps/>

Subdivision Plats

Years: various

Location: <http://ags.hawaii.gov/survey/map-search/>

Format: Online

Contents: copies of subdivision plats, variable quality

Online Newspapers Archive

ChroniclingAmerican.gov – free

Good for finding building permit listings, real estate articles, classified ads, general news articles, some house photos, real estate transactions, etc.

Newspapers.com - \$75 for 6 months, one week trial for free

Good for finding building permit listings, real estate articles, classified ads, general news articles, some house photos, real estate transactions, etc.

Hawaii Aerial Photographs

Years: 1950-2000

<https://uhmagis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=f6672e31727d49468a37b7bb3ab77d77/>

Click on the layers on the left tab to select the year/location.

ADVANCED RESEARCH MATERIALS

Building Permits

Check for permits here: gis.hicentral.com (Advanced Map). Building Permits issued prior to January 1972 are not available on-line and may no longer exist. To see if the city still has that information you can visit the Data Access and Imaging Branch on the first floor of the Fasi Municipal Building (FMB): 650 S King Street, Honolulu, HI 96813. Provide TMK to the C&C Real Estate office (basement of Old Police Station downtown) to see if they have records on construction date and layout/size of house. Early building permit listings are in daily newspapers.

Architectural Plans

The likelihood of finding actual house plans is close to zero the farther back you go. If you have a bungalow, it might be a plan from a published bungalow book. If any of the lumber in your house is numbered it might be from Aladdin, Sears, Montgomery Ward, or other catalogs of “ready-built” homes. If you find out who the architect was, check with the Hawaii State Archives or UH Manoa to see if they have any plans.

Photographs

Hawaii State Archives

<https://ags.hawaii.gov/archives/about-us/photograph-collection/>

Hundreds of photographs are searchable and available for free online, most are from the 1800's and early 1900's. Download their list of collections before going in person to do additional research for materials not digitized.

Bishop Museum – by appointment only, 2nd floor, building in back of main museum, photographs are in folders organized by street, or collection. Download their list of collections before going in person to do research.

Library of Congress – online, free

The Library of Congress's Prints & Photographs Online Catalog has a collection of measured drawings, large-format photographs, and written histories of tens of thousands of historic properties in its collection.

Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey Collection: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/>

Hawaiian Historical Society

<https://www.huapala.net/collections/browse>

UH Manoa Library Digital Image Collections

<https://digital.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/>

Nippu Jiji / Hawaii Times Photo Archives

www.hojishinbun.hoover.org

Deeds

Bureau of Conveyances

Years: 1800-present

Location: Bureau of Conveyances, 1st floor

Format: microfilm records for Land Court Documents and Transfer of Titles
Regular system deeds are hard copy

Contents: Direct Index (Grantor), Reverse Index (Grantee), copies of deeds

Not an easy search, very time-consuming and often difficult to read. (A friend at a title company can sometimes get copies of specific deeds).

State Historic Preservation Division

SHPD research library online: <https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/shpd/about/research-resources-library/>

Hawaii Historic Register nominations – go to SHPD home page to download a list of all Hawaii properties on the Hawaii and National Historic Register:

<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/shpd/>

Historic Hawaii Foundation

Many Hawaii or National Register nominations can be found on the Historic Hawaii Foundation website. Search properties by county. <https://historichawaii.org/historic-properties/oahu-historic-properties/>

Densho Encyclopedia

A great resource on the Japanese in Hawai'i and for WWII information.

<https://encyclopedia.densho.org/> -

Social Media

Can be useful for finding historic photos, relatives and connections and recommended resources, independently verify all information if at all possible.

- Facebook groups: Remember Oahu from the Past, Remember Oahu from the Past2, Remember Maui from the Past, Remember Big Island from the Past, Remember Kauai from the Past, Remember Molokai from the Past. These pages offer a search engine of their postings and comments for key words.
- Pinterest
- Flickr
- Instagram

MUSEUMS, INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS

You may find old photos and other historical materials at museums and local historical societies. These collections may provide historical materials such as missionary letters, journals, Hawaiian church records, Hawaiian language materials, photographs and images of Hawaii and the Pacific that would be helpful. Remember, however, historical materials that pre-date the construction of your house might not be directly relevant to its significance, but this information can give you a better understanding of the individuals who built and lived in the home.

- Hawaii State Archives (HAS) – Located behind Iolani Palace in the white boxy building behind the one that says “archives”, walk-ins welcome, metered parking (ags.hawaii.gov/archives)
- Bureau of Conveyances – 1151 Punchbowl, metered parking (dlnr.hawaii.gov/boc)
- Hawaii State Library (librarieshawaii.org)
- State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD) – 601 Kamokila Blvd, Suite 555, Kapolei, by appointment only (dlnr.hawaii.gov/shpd)
- City and County of Honolulu, Department of Planning & Permitting (DPP) -650 S. King Street (www.honoluludpp.org)
- City and County of Honolulu Real Property Assessment Division Property Records Search (www.qpublic.net/hi/honolulu/search.html)
- UH Hamilton Library (manoa.hawaii.edu/library)
- Bishop Museum (bishopmuseum.org)
- Mission Houses Museum Library (missionhouses.org)
- Hawaiian Historical Society (hawaiianhistory.org)
- Lyman Museum (lymanmuseum.org)

- Kona Historical Society (konahistorical.org)
- Kauai Historical Society (kauaihistoricalsociety.org)
- Bailey House Museum: Maui Historical Society, Bailey House Museum (mauimuseum.org)
- Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii (jcch.com)
- Hawaii Heritage Center (hawaiiheritagecenter.org)
- Historic Hawaii Foundation (historichawaii.org)

HAWAII STATE LIBRARY

Hawaii's public libraries offer old newspaper and map collections, as well as reference materials, which can be used to better understand the social, economic, and political history of your neighborhood, as well as the individuals associated with an old building. Hawaii State Library system, and the locations for each island can be found on the website at: <https://www.librarieshawaii.org/>

- **Genealogical Resources for Hawai'i:**
<https://www.librarieshawaii.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Genealogical-Resources-HPLS.pdf>
- **Obituaries** can give insight into people's lives. Map collections, such as the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, the U.S. Geographical Survey (USGS) maps, and old city or county maps provide information about streets and buildings as they were in the past.
- **Phonebooks.** Once you know the name of someone who lived at your residence, you can determine how long they lived there by checking historic (annual) phone books, and check them year by year.
- **Subject matter books.** History books, such as, Edward D. Beechert's *Honolulu Crossroads of the Pacific* (University of South Carolina Press, 1991), provide many details about Honolulu.
- **The state library sale and used book stores** are great if you like to have your own library. Especially useful are vintage architectural style books and architecture dictionaries.

HAWAII STATE ARCHIVES

The Hawaii State Archives has old photographs, aerial photographs, old city directories that list people's names and occupations, maps, and other types of historical materials that may provide this type of information. <https://ags.hawaii.gov/archives>

HAWAII-PACIFIC COLLECTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

This collection includes journals and periodicals, as well as newspapers, videotapes, and special collections, such as, the Hawaii Sugar Planter's Association archives with some of the plantation's original house plans. The Hawaii-Pacific Collection can be reached at (808) 956-8264 or email speccoll@hawaii.edu. The website is:

Pacific Collection - Hawaiian & Pacific Collections Department - Research Guides at University of Hawaii at Manoa

<https://guides.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/c.php?g=447018&p=3054399>

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR NRHP APPLICATIONS:

National Park Service, National Historic Landmarks

Research the History of a Property for National Historic Landmark Nomination

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/research.htm/>

National Register of Historic Places (U.S. National Park Service) ([nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov))

U.S Geographical Survey (USGS) Topographical Maps

USGS topographical maps show the shape and elevation of the land and include both natural and manmade features, such as roads, boundaries, transmission lines, and major buildings. These maps are useful tools in understanding the pattern of development in your part of the islands. Historic USGS topographic maps of various areas in Hawai'i can be found in the Hawai'i State Library's Map Collection.

Click any point on the primary map and it will show available historic maps on the side bar. You can then select a specific map, and click the "Show" icon which will overlay your chosen map on the location you have pin-pointed. The site also allows toggling between other maps so you can play with the overlay transparencies to see how an area was documented and developed over time.

<https://www.usgs.gov/the-national-map-data-delivery/topographic-maps/>

AHUPUA‘A & MOKU

Ahupua‘a is a Hawaiian term for a large traditional socioeconomic, geologic, and climatic subdivision of land typically running mauka to makai.

Moku or district is a land division that sections off portions of each island. After the Great Mahele, the islands were divided into districts.

<https://kipukadatabase.com/kipuka/>

<http://www.ahamoku.org/index.php/maps/>

RECOMMENDED READING

House Histories - A Guide to Tracing the Genealogy of Your Home

Author: Sally Light, Golden Hill Press, 1993

Years: various

Format: softcover book

Great suggestions for detailed house research.

A Field Guide to American Houses

Author: Virginia & Lee McAlester, Random House, 1984

Years: 1600-present

Format: softcover book

Excellent photos and sketches, highly recommended.

The Visual Dictionary of American Domestic Architecture

Author: Rachel Carley, Henry Holt & Co., 1997

Years: "Tipi to Tract House"

Format: hardcover book

Good sketches, no photos.

American Shelter

Author: Lester Walker, The Overlook Press, 1996

Years: 300A.D. to 2000A.D.

Format: paperback

Excellent sketches and descriptions, no photos.

Identifying American Architecture": A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms: 1600-1945

Author: John J.G. Blumenson, W.W. Norton & Co., 1977

Years: 1600-1945

Format: paperback

Good photos, good explanations of details.

How Old Is This House?

Author: Hugh Howard, Noonday Press, 1989

Years: 1630-1930

Format: hardcover book

Mostly text, good chapter on oral histories.

What Style Is It?: A Guide to American Architecture

Author: John C. Poppeliers, S. Allen Chambers, Nancy B. Schwartz, National Trust, 1995

Years: 1600-1930

Format: softcover booklet

Good photos, brief descriptions.

Styles and Types of North American Architecture

Author: Alan Gowans, Icon Editions, 1992

Years: 1600-1980

Format: paperback

House Styles in America - The Old House Journal Guide to the Architecture of American Homes

Author: James C. Massey & Shirley Maxwell, Penguin, 1999

Years: 1640-1950

Format: hardcover book

The Comfortable House: North American Suburban Architecture 1890-1930

Author: Alan Gowans, MIT Press, 1987

Years: 1890-1930

Format: hardcover book

Excellent source for domestic architecture, great photos.

America's Favorite Homes: Mail Order Catalogues and 20th Century Houses

Author: Robert A. Schweitzer & Michael W.R. Davis, Wayne State University Press, 1990

Years: 1890-1950

Format: paperback

Great information and photos on kit and mail order homes and companies.

Gustav Stickley - Craftsman Homes

Author: Gustav Stickley (reprint), Gramercy Books, 1995

Years: 1890-1930

Format: hardcover book

Reprint of articles from Gustav Stickley's "Craftsman" magazine.

The California Bungalow

Author: Robert Winter, Hennessey & Ingalls, 1980

Years: 1900-1930

Format: paperback

Good history and photographs of bungalows.

Houses By Mail

Author: Katherine Stevenson, H. Ward Jandl, 1986

Years: 1908-1940

Format: paperback book

Contents: *Sears Roebuck kit houses, photos, sketches, floorplans, no addresses*

Montgomery Ward's Mail-Order Homes: A History and Field Guide to Wardway Homes

Author: Rose Thornton & Dale Patrick Wolicki, Gentle Beam Publications, 2010

Years: 1909-1931

Format: softcover book

Contents: *Montgomery Ward kit houses, photos, sketches, floorplans*

Saving the Neighborhood

Author: Peggy Robin, Woodbine House, 1995

Format: softcover book

The definitive guide for fighting against inappropriate development.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PUBLICATIONS:

Researching a Historic Property - 1991

(National Register Bulletin 39)

How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation - 1991

(National Register Bulletin 15)

How to Complete the National Register Registration Form - 1991

(National Register Bulletin 16A)

MAGAZINES

Preservation Magazine

The National Trust for Historic Preservation

1785 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 588-6000

Old House Journal

Two Main Street, Gloucester, MA 01930

(800) 234-3797, \$27



ABOUT HISTORIC HAWAII'Ī FOUNDATION

Historic Hawai'i Foundation (HHF) is a membership-based, statewide non-profit organization. HHF was established in 1974 to encourage the preservation of historic buildings, sites, objects and communities on all the islands of Hawai'i. HHF provides education, advocacy and technical assistance to help preserve, enhance, celebrate and use the places that matter.

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DISCLAIMER

The information and references in this directory are accurate and current to the best of our knowledge as of August 2022. Information is subject to change. Please feel free to email member@historichawaii.org with updates to the listed information.