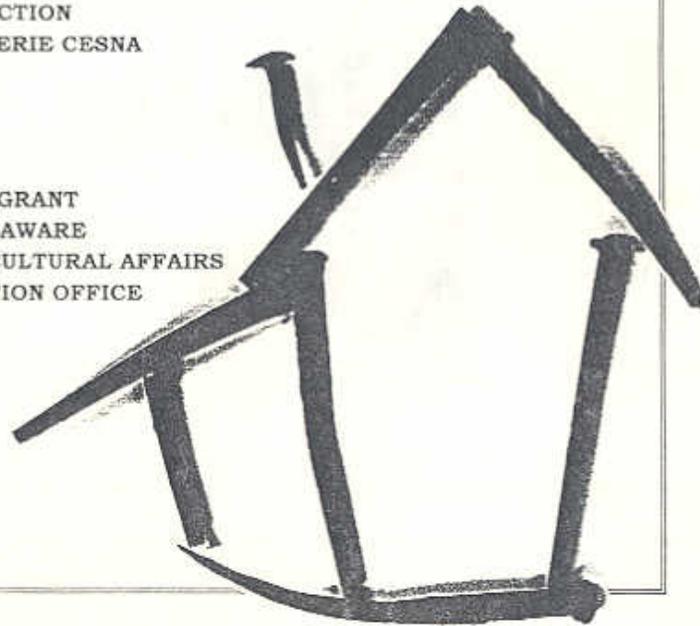


RESEARCH GUIDE

**HOW TO RESEARCH
THE HISTORY OF
YOUR HOME
IN NEW CASTLE COUNTY,
DELAWARE**

PREPARED BY: NEW CASTLE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
HISTORIC PRESERVATION SECTION
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WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF A GRANT
PROVIDED BY: STATE OF DELAWARE
DIVISION OF HISTORICAL & CULTURAL AFFAIRS
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



1996

This guide serves as a tool for researching a property in New Castle County, and can be useful for Kent and Sussex county research as well.

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1. Introduction

If you live in an old house, you have probably wondered when it was built, what it looked like in the past, and who lived there before you. Researching the history of your home can answer these questions. You may have to do considerable detective work, but you will have a lot of fun uncovering some interesting facts along the way. You may learn how people lived in the past and how your community evolved. The history you uncover will contribute to the understanding of our local history and culture. The results of this research can make your home more personal and help you make informed decisions about how to undertake renovations.

This booklet will guide you to some basic sources of information and to the local research facilities where information about New Castle County properties can be found. If you continue your research, you will undoubtedly discover other sources not listed here. One piece of information may provide clues to more. Some properties are very well documented, while others yield few clues about their past. This depends on how often previous owners were involved in activities that required filing legal documents or how active they were in community affairs. There is no way to predict what you will find until you begin.



READ MANSION, ON DELAWARE BAY, NEW CASTLE, DEL., IN COLONIAL DAYS

Residence of George Read, Attorney General in 1763, and afterwards. a Signor of the Declaration of Independence and Framers of the Constitution of the United States.

This research guide has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, department of the Interior. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Department of the Interior.

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2. Research Facilities

General guidelines: Call in advance of your visit to check current hours of operation and to discuss your research project. Some facilities have limited staff and need advance notice to retrieve special records for you. Be prepared to conduct your own research once you arrive. Bring plenty of paper and pencil s. (Many libraries do not allow ink pens in the research rooms.) All facilities charge for photocopies. Bring change to make microfilm copies.

(CHAD) [Center for Historic Architecture and Design](#), Alison Hall, University of Delaware, (302) 831-8097. Call for an appointment to see records of the Historic American Buildings Survey and Historic American Engineering Record, as well as other research files maintained in this office.

(DESHPO) [Delaware State Historic Preservation Office](#), 15 The Green, Dover, (302) 739-5685, M-F 8- 5. This office maintains the list of National Register properties in the state, as well as the Delaware Cultural Resource Survey, including the original photographs taken by surveyors from the 1970s to the present. You can also find a reference library of Delaware-related materials here. Call in advance.

(DGS) [Delaware Geological Survey](#), Cartographic Information Center, University of Delaware, (302) 831-2833. Park in Visitor Parking Lot #57, Academy St. This office maintains a computer database of aerial photographs and maps located in collections throughout Delaware. If an aerial photograph or map of your area exists, you will find a reference in the database to the research facility where the material is housed. You must seek out the photograph or map yourself. Databases are available at the DGS Home page on the World Wide Web. The URL is <http://www.udel.eduldgs/dgs.html>.

(DSA) [Delaware State Archives](#), Hall of Records, Duke of York St. and Legislative Ave., Dover, (302) 744-5000. The repository for non-current records of state, counties, and some municipalities, the Archives houses a good collection of government documents (including census and assessment records), deeds, wills, probates, court records, maps, books, genealogical records, photographs, and insurance records.

(HML) [Hagley Museum & Library](#), Rt. 141 & Brandywine River, (302) 658-2400, M-F and 2nd Sat. of month. The focus of this collection is industrial history, but other information on local history is available, including historic maps, photographs, and manuscript collections.

(HSD) [Historical Society of Delaware](#), 505 N. Market St., Wilmington, (302) 655-7161, M-F, evening hours on Monday. The state's largest collection of Delaware history materials is located here, including books, articles, directories, newspapers, census records, family histories, private papers and journals, maps, and photographs.

(NC) New Castle County Department of Planning, 2701 Capitol Trail, Newark, (302) 366-7780 ext. 200, M-F 8-4. The Historic Preservation Section is familiar with current construction and documentation projects affecting historic houses in unincorporated areas of the county. The section maintains a complete record of National Register nominations and Delaware Cultural Resource Survey forms for properties in the county. Call in advance to make an appointment.

(RD) [New Castle County Recorder of Deeds](#), Louis L. Redding City/County Building, 800 N. French St., 4th Floor, Wilmington, (302) 395-7700, M-F 9-5. This is the official repository for deed records in New Castle County. The research room is open to the public. Some limited assistance is available to help you locate records, but you must conduct your own research. Coin-operated photocopy machines are available.

(RW) [New Castle County Register of Wills](#), Register of Wills for New Castle County is located at the Louis L. Redding City/County Building, 800 French Street, 2nd Floor, Wilmington, DE 19801. Business hours are 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

(UD) [University of Delaware, Morris Library](#), S. College Ave., Newark, (302) 831-2665 Hours; 831- 2965 Information; 831-1732 Microforms; 831-2229 Special Collections. Open daily. Hours vary with school calendar. Historical materials are dispersed in this large library. Check at the Information Desk in the lobby for assistance and a floor plan. See especially the Delaware Collection within the Department of Special Collections for manuscripts, diaries, photographs, etc., and the Microforms Area for deeds, wills, probates, court, census records, newspapers, and some maps. This library has produced a guide to genealogical records within its collections. DELCA T, the computerized card catalog, is on-line.

[New Castle County Public Library System](#) Particularly strong in Delaware-related materials are the Concord Pike Library, Corbit-Calloway Library, Newark Library, New Castle Public Library, and the Wilmington Institute Free Library. At the latter, see the "Delaware Index," a subject and biographical index to *Wilmington News Journal* articles, books, and pamphlets from the 1920s to 1977.

3. Looking At Your House

Your house itself is one of the most important sources of information for you. Almost every house holds clues to its history if you know where to look. Each generation leaves evidence of its stay, whether it is through building an addition, remodeling, landscaping, or simply changing the color scheme. As you look at your house, try to determine its original appearance and the chronology of change. Clues are often hidden in the basement and attic, inside closets, or under modern finishes. Make a thorough inspection of your house. Once you begin documentary research, you may uncover information that confirms your observations. Take notes and photographs to record your discoveries and the changes *you* make.

Architectural Style

Knowing the architectural style of your house can assist you in dating it in a general way. Look at the style guides listed in Section 8 of this booklet to learn about the style of your house. These guides define time periods when different architectural styles were popular. Be aware that some regions of the country favored certain styles long after they had passed out of fashion elsewhere. Public buildings and large mansions frequently exhibit the latest styles of their time, like the Grand Opera House in Wilmington, built in 1871 in the Second Empire style. But, the average person probably was not on the cutting edge of fashion. In the past, as now, people built what they liked, what was familiar, and what was affordable. See the book *Everyday Architecture of the Mid- Atlantic*, listed in Section 8, for approximate dates for popular architectural styles in Delaware.

Additions

Few houses are frozen in time. Additions provide important evidence about how your house was used through time. An addition may be obvious if one section of your house is made of different materials or exhibits a different style. A joint in a masonry foundation or a vertical seam in a wall probably indicates the location of an addition. A porch with a more modern style and materials than the main building is probably an addition. For example, a Greek Revival style house with a Victorian "gingerbread" porch displays styles from two distinct time periods.

Remodeling

If you familiarize yourself with the overall style of your house, you will be able to recognize some remodeling efforts by finding features that do not match. Is the trim in one room different from all the others? Are the style and material of the window sash and doors consistent with the style and time period of the house? Are the floor boards consistent throughout? Are there unusual bumps in the walls that could indicate where a wall was removed or a window filled in?

Perhaps some decorative features have been removed. Look for evidence of shutter hardware on the outside window frames to determine if shutters were an original feature. If there is a horizontal scar on the front of the house above the first story windows, maybe a porch was torn off and not replaced. Sometimes when aluminum or vinyl siding is added to a house, the decorative window trim is removed.

If your house is very old, look for signs of modern technologies being added during different time periods. Many houses originally heated by fireplaces were later fitted with stoves, which were eventually replaced by central heating. Frequently, elements of all three heating systems survive. You may discover that one bedroom was remodeled to provide a bathroom, if there was originally no indoor plumbing.

Paint Colors

If you want to reproduce the original paint colors exactly, you would have to employ a professional paint analyst. (You might call a local museum to find such a person.) However, there is a lot to be learned on your own. As you study the finishes of your walls and trim, be aware that most paints fade or yellow over time. A professional analyst compensates for that effect through a chemical analysis of paint samples. A general idea of the original color scheme can be learned by taking the following steps.

If the build-up of paint on your house has never been scraped off, you can scratch through it with a sharp knife to reveal the layers. Remember, the bottom layer is probably a primer coat, not a finish color. Areas not exposed to the weather, such as underneath a porch or the underside of the eaves, are the best places to test. If the paint has been scraped off your house, you may still find

traces of original color behind trim pieces where paint tends to seep. Pry off a piece of trim to see. Test different areas to see if siding, trim, shutters, and doors were painted different colors. Similar techniques can be used on the interior, where the original colors and finishes might be found behind electrical switch plates or inside closets. Historians customarily leave such an area undisturbed, so future generations can have the same opportunity you have.

Roof and Exterior Wall Coverings

If your house is more than forty-years old, its roof has probably been replaced. Roofs wear out frequently. Look carefully and you may find two or three layers of wood shingle, sheet metal, or asphalt shingle underneath. The bottom layer could be the original.

Exterior wall materials sometimes get covered as they weather or as fashions and technologies change. In the second half of the nineteenth century, many older buildings were stuccoed in an effort to make them look more stylish. Stucco can be found on wood frame or masonry walls. Twentieth-century materials like vinyl siding, aluminum siding, asbestos shingle, and asphalt roll siding are a tip-off that older materials lie underneath. Only rarely is the original siding removed entirely.

Basements

In the basement you may find evidence of the original floor plan, additions, and previous heating systems. Examine the foundation walls carefully for seams or

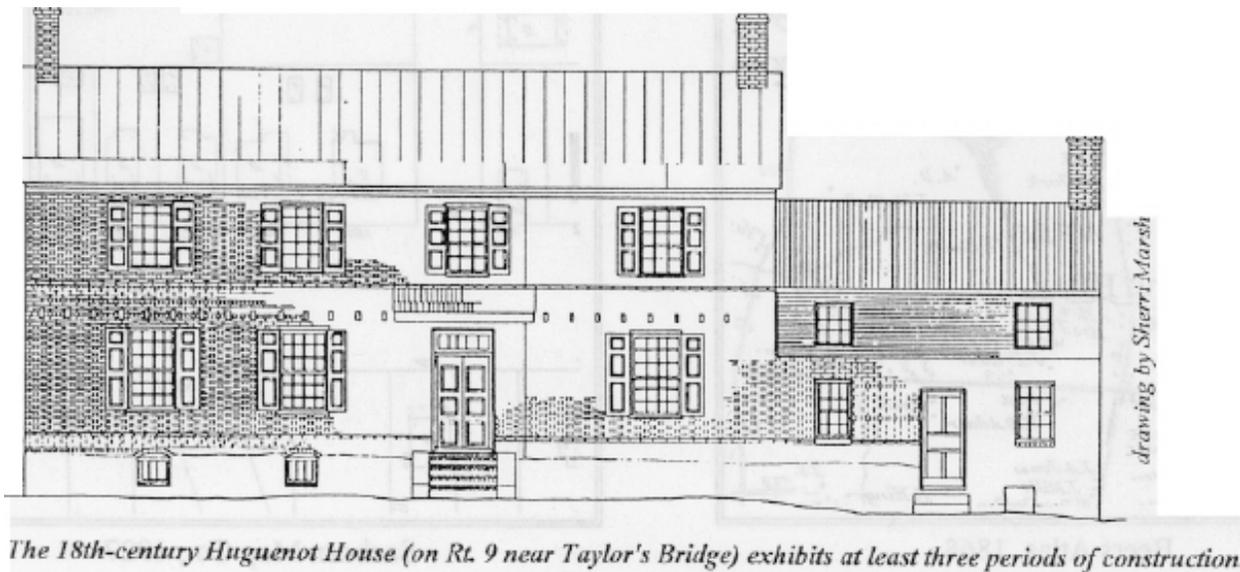
differences in materials that suggest part of the house is an addition. Study the first floor joists, visible from the basement. Do they follow the pattern of rooms on the first floor? Joists that are interrupted in one corner of the house by a heavy square framework may indicate the location of a boxed corner winder staircase that has been removed. Sometimes if a house has, or had, a central stair hall, the joists will run in a different direction in that area. Often, the dimensions of joists and their saw marks are different in additions.

If your house has, or had, fireplaces you will find masonry supports in the basement distributing the weight of the chimney and hearth to the ground. These supports can be in the form of a solid masonry block extending from the floor to the ceiling, or simply a bump or protrusion (called a

corbeled support), located on the basement wall near the ceiling. Frequently, the floor-to-ceiling supports feature a round-arched opening known as a relieving arch, which supports the weight of the fireplace above. Sometimes these arches are mistaken for filled-in fireplaces. A basement fireplace will look like a traditional fireplace with a square opening.

Attics

The framing system in the attic can also yield clues to the evolution of your house. Check the rafters in different wings for differences in framing method and the dimension and finish of lumber. If you have dormers, a close inspection of materials will help you determine if they are original to the house. Part of the chimney may be visible in the attic. Check to see if it has been rebuilt.



4. Maps and Atlases

Maps are an excellent source for beginning your research, because they provide much useful information at a glance. Many historic maps show individual buildings and are especially useful because they also record owners' names and features in the surrounding community. More detailed maps reveal property acreage and estate names. By examining a series of maps, you will be able to date changes in your property over time.

These are the most useful maps for researching historic properties in New Castle County, Delaware:

Samuel Rea & Jacob Price, *Map of New Castle County*, 1849. D. G. Beers, *Atlas of the State of Delaware*, 1868. G. M. Hopkins, *Map of New Castle County*, 1881, G. Will. Baist, *Atlas of New Castle County*, 1893.

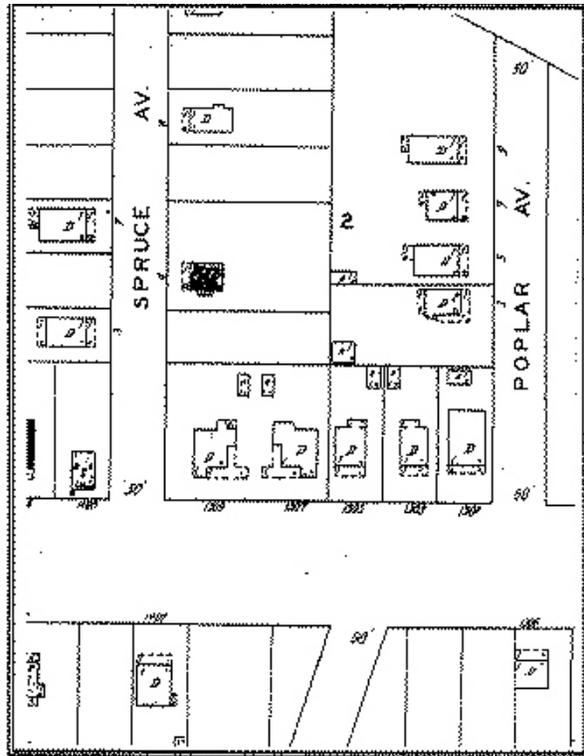
All available at DSA, HSD, HML, and some County Libraries.

If your building is located within a city, small town, or early suburb, seek out the Sanborn Insurance Company maps for your community. The insurance maps are very detailed, showing building dimensions, additions, and descriptions of construction materials. The first Sanborn maps in this area date to 1884.

Originals available at HSD, copies at DSA, UD on microfilm no. 3333, and HML at call no. F G 1265 82 1885



Beers Atlas, 1868



Sanborn Map Co., 1927

5. Deed Records

Your deed is like the title to your car. It is a legal document showing you as the owner of a parcel of land. The name of the person you bought the land from is also indicated on the deed. And, your deed will usually refer you to the previous deed for the property. The previous deed will tell you who sold the land to the person from whom you are now buying. By looking at several deed records transferring a parcel of land from one owner to the next, you can establish the chain of title--the official record for ownership of the land over the decades.

Why Look at Deeds?

In order to figure out when your house might have been built and why it looks the way it does, you need to find out certain facts about the owners of the property and the history of the land. The deed records contain these facts for just about every property you will investigate. These facts will allow you to access many of the other documents described in this guide. Deeds may be the only *legal* documents connected with your house that you will be able to find. These old handwritten records of the people who used to live in the house you now own give you a sense of your connection to these people of the past and the places they left behind.

What Are You Looking For?

The information to be extracted from the deed includes the dates of land transfers, names of property owners, purchase price, size and special features of the parcel, and sometimes direct references to the "buildings and appurtenances" on the land. This information is the backbone of the history of a home. A word of caution: it is critical to gather other information about the owners and the historic trends in the area, because a deed provides only raw data

about the land. For example, if a building has been moved or torn down, there will be no record of these events in the deeds. Although there is a method to doing a deed search, *you should expect to encounter apparent dead ends along the way*. This happens because the deed records are sometimes incomplete, or the property was not transferred through a deed. (See HINTS, below, for getting back on track.) When you start looking at other sources of information, like

old maps and tax records, you will be surprised at the usefulness of the information you have been able to uncover in the deed records.

Establishing the Chain of Title

Step 1: Begin with a Deed Number

Each deed is referenced by a number, composed of book, volume, and page, such as Book M, Volume 26, Page 345 (or M26/345 for short). To begin the search, if you do not already have a deed number, you can use the Deed Index. There are indices for both the buyers (grantees) and the sellers (grantors). If you are researching your home, you can find your name in the grantee index, known as the Indirect Index. The Indirect Index will refer you to your deed by its book, volume, and page number.

For example, if you want to look at the deed for a property you know was purchased by Jane Doe (the buyer or grantee) about 1965-1970, look at the Indirect Index for this time period, and find the "D" section. Within each section the index is alphabetized by the first letter of the first name. It is therefore very important to know the first name of the person! You may see something like this:

Step 2: Indirect Index

Grantee	Grantor	Book&Volume Page	Year
Dykstra, Joshua, & wf	Jos. Dixon	L11/001	1965
Doe, Jane	Jos. Dixon	M26/345	1967
Davis, Joshua	Jos. Dixon	N30/072	1967
Doe, Jason	Jos. Dixon	O2/222	1969

This deed, made this 1st day of September in the year of our Lord 1967 . . .

This is the key date. The date at the bottom of the document will be later because it is the date the deed was filed.

*Between Joseph Dixon, party of the first part,
and
Jane Doe, party of the second part,
For the consideration of \$67,000 . . .*

Joseph Dixon, the grantor, is selling the land to Jane Doe, the grantee, for \$67,000.

*All Those certain lots, pieces, or parcels of land, containing 0.5 acres, with the stone
house thereon erected, or
All That messuage and tenements, plantation, and tract of land.*

The "All Those" or "All That" phrase is a key phrase because it tells you what is being transferred. Sometimes, if you're lucky, the language here will be specific about the buildings on the tract of land.

Beginning at . . .

This "Beginning at" phrase will be followed by a description of the parcel's boundaries and size.

*Being the same lands and premises of [the previous owner]
by deed dated _____ in deed record _____.*

Be aware that deeds are for the most part "fill-in-the-blank" documents. You will find certain phrases repeated that do not apply to your property, but are part of the legal language of the deed. For example, you may see the phrase:

*Together with all and singular the houses, outhouses, trees, yards, ways, paths, woods,
watercourses, etc.,*

when there are no houses, outhouses, trees, yards, ways, paths, woods, or watercourses on your property. This phrase simply assures that the seller is turning over all rights to any of the possible things that could be encountered on the land.

☛ Be sure to jot down the number of the previous deed so you can continue your deed search.

Step 3: Search Chain of Title

With the deed number referenced at the end of the deed, look up the deed of the previous owner. Continue this process until there are no buildings listed on the tract of land that is being transferred, or until you know you have gone far enough by the style of the house you are researching. If your search proceeds smoothly, you will end up in the late 1600s when deeds were first recorded in Delaware for land that was owned, divided, and sold by William Penn to Delaware's first European settlers. However, it is rarely necessary to go that far since there are few seventeenth-century buildings in Delaware!

HINTS

For many reasons you may lose the chain of title along the way. This sometimes happens when a deed does not refer you to the number of the previous deed. It is frustrating when the deed reads, *"Being the same lands and premises of Jane Doe by deed dated - in deed record -"* It and the blanks have not been filled in. However, with patience and persistence, you can sometimes get back on track. Try the following:

- Check the deed indices for the name of the previous owner (Jane Doe) and hope the deed number was recorded there.
- Sometimes you will find several people with the same name in the deed index. In these cases, it is useful to know something about the person whose property you are researching, especially occupation and place of origin. Then, although you may have to look at each deed for that name, you can eliminate much more readily. You should also look at the parcel description, because you might be able to recognize the land you are researching by its boundaries, size, and neighbors.
- Sometimes property belonged to the wife's family and was given to the bride and her new husband at their marriage. Earlier deeds will be found under the wife's maiden name.
- It could be that the land was transferred without a deed to a family member through a will record. You may therefore want to look at probate records, for the family names of both the husband and the wife.

- You may be able to look at an old map to find the name of an earlier property owner. You can then look up that name in the deed indices to find the deed reference.

Step 4: Interpreting Deed Information

Dates of construction are seldom known with precision. More often than not, they are based on interpretation of documented evidence. In order to make a judgment about when a house or addition was built, you need to be aware of the changes in the size and cost of the parcel and also know something about the various owners. This is where additional research comes in handy. For example, if a property is tied up in legal documentation because of a death, construction would also likely come to a halt. Or, if census information indicates that the number of people in a household increased significantly during a ten-year span, this could support the idea that the addition to your residence was constructed at that time. If a parcel is located in an area that has recently been subdivided, construction would be expected. Maps can corroborate this idea because they might show that the land in the area was being subdivided at the time. A significant increase in the cost of the parcel can indicate a date of construction. Do not be dismayed if the deed doesn't say, "All those certain lots. .. with a frame house." It may not be that specific, but your interpretation based on size, cost, as well as other information, can lead to a fairly certain construction date. *By now you are becoming an accomplished detective!*

TIPS

- Bring with you to the Recorder of Deeds photocopies of old maps and a current road map. These help you pinpoint the parcel being described.
- Keep notes on deed book and page numbers, names of owners, their occupations and place of residence, dates of ownership, parcel size, cost, and buildings mentioned. How have these things changed from deed to deed?
- Try to draw the property description and take note of names of adjacent owners. Sometimes this information provides important clues, particularly if you have an old map in hand.

- A Note on Hundreds: What is a "hundred"? The original rationale for the division of land known as a hundred is not known with certainty. It is generally believed that years ago, in the Old World, territory was divided into areas large enough to contain one- hundred residents or families for the purpose of defense or local government, and that these areas became known as hundreds. The term was brought here in 1682, when William Penn divided the counties of Delaware into geographic areas, calling them hundreds, for the purpose of taxation. Although the term was also used in neighboring counties in Maryland and Pennsylvania, Delaware is today the only one of the original colonies to use this ancient term to describe the subdivisions of its counties.

Knowing the name of the hundred your house is in is necessary information for accessing many legal documents. In New Castle County, beware that prior to about 1832 Wilmington was part of Christiana Hundred, and, until 1875, there was no Blackbird Hundred. The area now known as Blackbird Hundred was part of Appoquinimink Hundred until that date, when the population of Appoquinimink Hundred had boomed and a new hundred, Blackbird Hundred, was created.

- A Note on Money: If you are paying close attention to the value through the years of the property being sold, you should note that until about 1800 the monetary system was English, and deeds reference the pound, shilling, and pence.

Where to Find Deeds

The place to go in most situations is the Recorder of Deeds in Wilmington. There, deeds are kept in books on shelves lining one side of the room. Older deeds are on microfilm. Indices to the deeds are located on tables in the middle of the room. You can also find early deed records (1660s to about 1850) at the University of Delaware on microfilm (microfilm number S334, grantor index S334.1, and grantee index S334.2). Deed records are also available in Dover at the State Archives. However, it might be a better use of your time to look at deeds in Wilmington or at the University of Delaware, and save your time in Dover for investigating other sources described in this guide.

Deed Records available at RD, UD, DSA

KEY WORDS

GRANTOR = Seller of Property

GRANTEE = Purchaser or Buyer

DIRECT INDEX = Index of Grantors

INDIRECT INDEX = Index of Grantees

6. Estate Records

Estate records document the value of property and how it is transferred to heirs and beneficiaries after the owner's death. This is valuable information to historians, because frequently these records contain details about a person's land, house, and belongings, as well as relationships with family and community.

Wills

If a person left a will, it will be recorded at the Register of Wills office in Wilmington. With the chain of title for your property in hand, look up the names of past owners in the main index to find the reference number for the will. (You may even have found a specific will reference in one of the deeds already.) Then, ask the staff to retrieve the microfilm records for you. Do not be surprised if you cannot find your owners' names in the index. Not everyone makes a will.

For a \$2.00 fee per name, the Register of Wills office will send you a letter outlining what records are available in their holdings.

Wills also available at UD (microfilm 8364 for wills dated 1682-1854), and DSA.

These reference books may prove helpful:

Viridin, Donald Odell, ed. *New Castle County, Delaware Wills and Estates, 1682-1800, An Index*. St. Michaels, MD: Raymond B. Clark, 1982.

Viridin, Donald Odell, ed. *Colonial Delaware Wills and Estates to 1880, An Index*. Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 1994.

National Society of Colonial Dames. *Delaware, A Calendar of Delaware Wills, New Castle County, 1682-1800*. New York, 1911. Available at UD (Spec.FI63 .V567 1994).

Probate Records

Probate records document how a person's estate was administered after death. You may find challenges made to the validity of a will and claims made against the estate for payment of debts. Records can include appraisals of real estate and property inventories, which can be especially valuable when researching the history of a house. Inventories vary in their level of detail. Typically, they list the contents of the house and outbuildings, giving the value for each item. If you are fortunate enough to find a room by room inventory, you may be able to reconstruct how each room was furnished and used, although be aware that sometimes furniture was moved around before being counted in inventories.

Available at DSA, UD (microfilm 3087 for 1670- 1860 records).

Orphans' Court Records

If a person died leaving minor children and did not make a will, disposition of assets was handled by the Orphans' Court. Typically, the court assigned a committee to survey and to determine the condition and value of real and personal estate before the court decided how it was to be transferred to the heirs. You will possibly find physical descriptions of the property. Sometimes you will find survey maps showing how different parts of the property were used, and, occasionally, the surveyor made little sketches of the buildings. Available at D8A, UD (microfilm 8365 for 1742-1868 records), and CHAD for verbatim building descriptions, 1770-1830.

Guardian Accounts

These records relate to Orphans' Court documents. They chronicle the activities of the estate as it is administered by the guardians assigned to orphaned heirs. Available at D8A (Uncataloged. You must ask for these records specifically), UD (microfilm 8365 for 1803-1869 records).

Chancery Court Records

Chancery Court handles cases when estates need to be divided among heirs. Like Orphans' Court records, you may find useful descriptions and survey maps. Available at UD (microfilm 8365 for 1833-1852 records, and state doc KFD 531.A514 *Delaware Chancery Reports*, 1814-).

7. Assessment and Census Records

These records kept by the government about the former occupants of your house can tell you who lived in your house, what their occupations were, what valuables they possessed, and other important clues.

Assessment Records

Assessment records are the records of the taxable holdings of property owners, on which local taxes were based. Taxes were collected locally for such purposes as financing public schools. In order to base the taxes on the value of the property, tax assessors went door to door recording information on the owner's holdings, such as land, buildings, and outbuildings. In some years, only a monetary value was recorded, but *you* may find years when buildings, livestock, slaves, and other taxable property was listed. These public records are available for a wide range of years, from the late eighteenth century to the 1940s.

How to use? Look up the homeowner's name (under the first letter of the last name) in the hundred where the home is located. As with other records, you are looking for changes over time. Here, the change may be an increase in tax value from one assessment year to another. Such an increase could mean that a house was built. Or, the rise in value could refer to the construction of an addition or other improvement. It is useful to link the assessment information with other facts about the occupants. Have the occupants recently married? Is their farm producing exceedingly well? Such information assists when making a conjecture that an increase in the assessed value indicates the date of an addition.

Available at DSA. Some holdings at HSD, UD

Census Records

Census records are Federal documents that record information on the population of the United States at ten-year intervals. You can find information relevant to a house's history in the population census, including statistics on the property owner, the head of the household, the

occupants of the house and their ages, occupations of the residents (including slaves or servants), race of occupants, and country of origin.

If your house was part of a farm, the Agricultural Census can provide you with information on the type of farming that was carried out on the property, including numbers of livestock, crops raised, and farm buildings. Another kind of census record is the Census of Industry. If your property was connected with some type of industry, such as milling or blacksmithing, you should also look at these records.

What census documents are available in Delaware? The first Federal population census was conducted in 1790. Delaware's census records for 1790 are missing and believed to have been destroyed during the War of 1812 when the British invaded Washington, D.C. (Instead, see Leon De Valinger, *Reconstructed 1790 Census of Delaware*. Wash. D.C.: National Genealogical Society, 1954. At UD: Ref. HA 296 .D481954.) Delaware's census records for 1890 have also been lost. Population census records up to 1920 have been released and are available for Delaware. Delaware's Agricultural Census and Census of Industry are available for the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Until about 1850, the information collected by census takers varied considerably. You will find more consistency in later records.

How to use? It is necessary to know what hundred a person lived in to find that person in census records. What you want to use are the enumeration schedules for the population census. These schedules give you the detailed information recorded by the census taker at each house visited. They are not in alphabetical order, but are in the order of the houses visited by the census taker for each hundred. However, there is an easy way to find the person you are researching in the enumeration schedules. Indices have been created for census years 1800-1870. These are in separate bound volumes. All you have to do is look up the name of the individual in the index, jot down the reference number, and then go to the census records on microfilm. The Agricultural Census and Census of Industry are also organized by hundred.

Population Census available at DSA, HSD, UD (microfilm S550). Population Census indices at UD (Ref. F 163.J33).

Census of Industry and Agricultural Census for 1850-1870 available at DSA, HSD.

8. Secondary Sources

Even if a book has not been written about your house, the observations of historians on similar topics will broaden your perspective. Listed below are some of the most useful sources to get you started. There are many more books, reports, and articles on more specific topics available at the local research facilities listed in Section 2 of this guide.

Delaware Architecture

Bennett, George Fletcher. *Early Architecture of Delaware*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1932. (DSA HSD, UD)

Chase, Susan Mulchahey, David L. Ames, and Rebecca J. Siders. "Suburbanization in the Vicinity of Wilmington, Delaware, 1880-1950+/-: A Historic Context." University of Delaware, College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, 1992. (CHAD, DESHPO)

This report describes the history and design of 176 suburban neighborhoods around Wilmington.

Eberlein, Harold Donaldson and Cortland Hubbard. *Historic Houses and Buildings of Delaware*. Dover, DE: Public Archives Commission, 1962. (DSA, HSD, UD)

Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Delaware. *Delaware: A Guide to the First State*. New York: the Viking Press, 1938. (DSA, HSD, UD, some County Libraries)

Also look for the revised edition: *Delaware: A Guide to the First State*. Ed. Jeannette Eckman. New York: Hasting House, 1955. Both versions provide information on Delaware history and architecture and include driving tours.

Fisher, Caroline C., Allison W. Elterich, Bernard L. Herman, and Rebecca J. Siders. "Marshland Resources in the Delaware Estuary, 1830 to 1950 +/-: A Historic Context." University of Delaware, College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, 1993. (CHAD, DESHPO)

Hennan, Bernard. *Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware 1700-1900*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987. (DSA, HSD, UD)

A detailed study of architecture and agriculture in southern New Castle County.

Historic American Buildings Survey. (UD microfilm no. 425 and CHAD)

Begun in 1933, this is a national archive of photographs and measured drawings of important historic architecture.

Lanier, Gabrielle M. and Bernard Hemlan. *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic: Looking at Buildings and Landscapes*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, (available spring 1997).

Delaware History

Many local research facilities have good collections of Delaware history books.

This short list will get you started.

Conrad, Henry C. *History of the State of Delaware*. Wilmington, DE: The Author, 1908. (HSD, DSA)

Delaware History. (HSD, UD, DSA, some County Libraries) .

The journal of the Historical Society of Delaware contains many excellent articles on local historical topics. Publication began in 1946.

Delaware, A History of the First State. Ed. H. Clay Reed. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1947.

Munroe, John A. *History of Delaware*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1976. (HSD, DSA, UD)

Runk, J. M. & Co. *Biographical and Genealogical History of the State of Delaware*. Chambersburg, P A: Runk, 1899. (DSA, HSD, UD)

Scharf, J. Thomas. *History of Delaware 1609-1888*. 2 Volumes. Philadelphia: L. P. Richards and Co., 1888. (HSD, UD, DSA, some county libraries)

This two-volume set provides a general history of the state, its "hundreds," and some family histories.

Clinton A. Weslager and Carol E. Hoffecker have written many excellent books on Delaware topics--look for them!

Architectural Style Guides

Style guides may help you understand more about the appearance of your house. Although you may not find the exact style of your house illustrated, you can learn about the styles that could have influenced the builder of your home. These are three titles to look for, but there are many other style guides available at libraries and bookstores.

McAlester, Virginia and Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.

Poppeliers, John C., S. Allen Chambers, Jr., and Nancy B. Schwartz. *What Style is It? A Guide to American Architecture*. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1983.

Ritkind, Carole. *A Field Guide to American Architecture*. New York: New American Library, 1980.

Historical Archaeology and the Landscape

You may want to delve deeper into the past through the perspective of the professional archaeologist. These authors teach us to respect the value of both the smallest piece of historical matter and the landscape that surrounds the house, by showing how the combination of research and artifacts, both large and small, can open the door to reveal the day-to-day lives of previous occupants.

Deetz, James. *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life*. Rev. ed. New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1996.

Deetz offers a very readable lesson on decoding the stories about the former occupants of our homes, stories embedded in commonplace objects of the past, the "small things forgotten." Deetz's insights range from the house itself, seen as a reflection of the changing needs, traditions, abilities, and aspirations of former occupants, to the fragment of a dish found in the house, through which we can begin to learn about the culture of the previous occupants. Revised edition includes a chapter on the influence of African culture on America.

Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape. Ed. Rebecca Yamin and Karen B. Metheny. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996.

Twelve essays, on the cutting edge of research, will inspire the homeowner to think about how the landscape, like the house, can be an expression of the lives of former occupants. A variety of interdisciplinary sources are used to study different kinds of landscapes, such as the gardens of elite men and women, and ruins left standing in a rural countryside. Through their methodical studies of human interaction with the landscape, these authors tell stories about political viewpoints, religious beliefs, gender roles, and other human expressions.

Mrozowski, Stephen A., Grace H. Ziesing, and Mary C. Beaudry. *Living on the Boott: Historical Archaeology at the Boott Mills Boarding Houses*. Lowell, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1996.

A readable tale about the discovery of the different lifestyles at the boarding houses, tenements, and mill agents' houses in Lowell. The tale is woven from evidence uncovered by a team of researchers. Through their respect for the value of the smallest piece of matter, combined with careful record keeping and analysis, they reveal details about the lives of the occupants of these buildings that will amaze the reader.

Stewart-Abernathy, Leslie C. "Urban Farmsteads: Household Responsibilities in the City." *Historical Archaeology*. 20 (1986): 5-15. (Available at UD, Call No. E 11 .S625)

Even if your house is located in a village, it was originally surrounded by accessory buildings you might expect to find only on the farm, such as chicken houses and root cellars. This article, a case study of the town of Washington, Arkansas, provides a model for understanding your "urban farmstead." The author teaches you about the routine daily activities that would have taken place in your yard and how those activities evolved or were replaced as technologies and community ideals changed. Perhaps your garage is located where the horse barn stood!

9. Other Places To Find House History

Genealogy

Learning more about the descent of the people who used to live in your home can be useful to your research. Genealogical research includes vital records (birth, marriage, and death records), compiled from newspapers, church records, tombstones, and family bibles. It also includes family and personal papers, such as old letters and diaries. For example, you might look for the death record for a previous homeowner to find the date of death. Then, look for an obituary in an old newspaper to learn about the person's life, which may give you a better idea about why that person settled in the area and built the house.

Both the Historical Society and the State Archives are good sources for finding genealogical materials and for learning about how to do genealogical research. The Historical Society is home base to the Delaware Genealogical Society, which offers educational programs about family research to its members. The University of Delaware library has produced a free pamphlet, available in the Reference Room, about conducting genealogical research in its collections.

Available at HSD, DSA, UD

Historic Photographs

In many cases when researching a home, an old photograph is the best source for information that may not have been preserved anywhere else. For example, you can learn about the original materials, the siding, shutters, and trim, which may have been changed or lost over time. You can learn about dates of additions. You can see how the house used to be landscaped. You can see how the neighborhood used to look when the sidewalks were brick, the streets were lined with trees, and picket fences enclosed the front yards.

The Historical Society has a large collection of photographs. The card catalog is organized by subject headings, such as agriculture, buildings, jails, stores, etc., and then alphabetically within each category. At the State Archives, photographic archives include photos taken by the State Highway Department before beginning a road project. The Hagley Library is a good source for

aerial and other photographs. To find out whether an old aerial photograph exists for your area, check with the Delaware Geological Survey. Be sure to talk to longtime residents and business owners, such as the employees of the post office, fire hall, bank, or stores.

Available at HSD, DSA, HML, DGS

Survey & National Register Documents

Across the country over the past several decades, historians have been canvassing the highways and byways in search of old buildings. In New Castle County, more than 13,000 historic properties, including buildings, engineering works, bridges, archaeological sites, and other things old, have been systematically inventoried and photographed. Though sometimes there is very little information on the survey forms, these records occasionally contain wonderful clues. Out of the 13,000 known properties, nearly 300 individual properties and historic districts have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places in New Castle County. These are the prime examples of the architecture and the history of the county. Perhaps your house is eligible!

Survey Records are available at NC, DESHPO National Register Reports are available at NC, DESHPO, and see HSD for older nominations only

Newspapers

Newspapers can provide interesting data, including a notice about a public auction of the home you are researching, an obituary of a former homeowner, or an article about an event that brought prosperity or led to the demise of the community. However, you may not find any of these things, for newspapers can be a low-yield source for researching a specific house. The Historical Society has many early Delaware papers from the late-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century; bound originals of the *Every Evening* from 1871 to 1932; and miscellaneous issues of many smaller papers, such as the *Delaware City News*. See the Newspaper Card Catalog there. The University of Delaware has a number of papers on microfilm, including a good collection of the *Journal Every Evening* (Microfilm S39). A finding guide for newspapers, called the "Union List of Newspapers in Delaware," was produced by the University of Delaware in 1990. At the Wilmington Institute Free Library, see the "Delaware Index" for references to

articles in the *News Journal* from the 1920s to 1977. Available at HSD, UD, DSA, and the Wilmington Institute Free Library in the New Castle County Public Library System

Oral History

Tape-recorded individual personal recollections of Delawareans are invaluable for filling in the gaps you find in documentary history and for preserving local lore. Oral history tapes and transcripts are available at the Historical Society, including oral histories collected by the Delaware Chapter of the Society of Colonial Dames in America and the World War II Oral History Project. Other oral histories are preserved in Special Collections at the University of Delaware. The Hagley Museum and Library is also a source for oral histories, primarily relating to the Brandywine Valley. Check with the Delaware Heritage Commission, (302) 577-2144, for more information about oral histories. The Delaware Agricultural Museum and Village, (302) 734-1618, also has a collection of oral histories. The best sources for you, however, are probably the longtime residents of your community and former occupants of your home. Record their memories!

Available at HSD, and, HML

Court Records

Court records are complicated sources, but you may want to investigate these records if you have learned that your property was involved in a bankruptcy proceeding or was the site of a crime. Not infrequently people have gone bankrupt and their property has been possessed by the Sheriff of New Castle County. If you encounter this during a deed search, you may be in luck. Frequently the deed will refer to the date of the sheriff's sale of the property, which, by law, had to be publicly advertised. Take note of the auction date and look in a newspaper, where you may find a descriptive notice of the house to be auctioned. During bankruptcy it is common for a property to be inventoried for its value, and some inventories have been preserved at the State Archives. You will need the approximate date of the bankruptcy proceeding, so an archivist can guide you to the court that would have handled the case. You will then have to look through the docket books and case files to find the name of the bankrupt individual. (There is no index!) Ideally, you will find an inventory of the

possessions of the bankrupt individual. Crime records are also hit-or-miss sources, which can be useful because they can contain detailed descriptions of a property and its furnishings. Ask about this type of record at the Delaware State Archives. Available at DSA

Insurance Records

Some of the buildings in New Castle County were insured by the Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company. The insurance records list the buildings being insured and their value. For example, the policy taken by Caleb and John Marshall of Marshallton in 1840 insured their grain mill, assessed at \$2500, and their rolling mill, assessed at \$1000. This information tells us what was on a parcel at this particular date and the relative importance of the resources.

Available at HSD, Acc. 89.41

City and State Directories

Directories are similar to our phone books and can help a researcher track an individual or a community through time. The Wilmington directories include listings of names, occupations, and addresses for residents of the city and for some areas outside of the city proper for the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the present (UD, HSD, F 173.16 .W74). Nineteenth-century state directories are arranged by town and offer descriptions of the communities, which can help to establish the historic setting of the building you are researching (HSD, DSA). There are also some early versions of the yellow pages, which list Delaware's businesses and industries (UD).

Historical Archaeology and the Landscape

The word archaeology usually conjures up the word dig, which is something that ought to be undertaken only by trained professionals. The starting-out point of the archaeologist, however, is a careful study of the landscape, which is useful for the homeowner, too. Try mapping features in your yard, such as fences, walks, drainage ditches, old plantings, and unusual bumps in the ground. Link what you see in your yard with other facts, and you will suddenly see how your house is still rooted in the past. To learn more, see the sources listed in the bibliography and contact the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office, where you can learn about local

archaeological organizations and about how archaeological sites are evaluated for the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Conclusion

This research guide shows that a house's history can be found in a tremendous number of places. With so many sources to investigate, where do you begin researching the history of your home? What sources are most promising? *How* do you research the history of your home in New Castle County?

Here's how. We recommend proceeding in the order that the information has been presented in this guide. Study your building first. Then, go to the library and look at old maps and atlases. Make photocopies or draw the section of the map that shows your house, recording landscape features and names of neighboring property owners, too. You might also want to peruse some of the secondary sources listed in the bibliography while you are there, particularly general histories about your area and style guides. Bring your map research and this research guide with you, and drive to the Recorder of Deeds in Wilmington. After completing the deed search, continue your research by looking at estate records, some of which can also be found in Wilmington. Drive to Dover to make a full investigation of assessment records and census records.

Once you have completed that step, you will have accomplished a lot! You will probably have a good idea about when your house was built, who lived in it, and how it has changed through the years. To flesh out the story you are assembling, read the books and articles listed in the bibliography that relate to your house, and explore some of the other places where house history can be found, listed in Section 9 of this guide, including directories, old photographs, etc.

No matter how many wonderful discoveries you make, the information you uncover will only be useful to you and others if you are careful to record what you find out. Take lots of notes and remember to write down the source where you found the information. Some people like to keep a house notebook, where they save: such things as house photographs, pieces of old wallpaper removed from the living room wall, notes from their house research, as well as records about their own improvements. This is a *great* idea.

Finally, there are other people out there who share your interest in house history. You may want to join Preservation Delaware, Inc., a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to the

preservation of Delaware's architectural heritage and historic settings. Call (302) 651-9617 to subscribe and receive informative newsletters and other membership benefits. Nationally, you can join the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the only national, private organization chartered by Congress to encourage public participation in the preservation of sites, buildings, and objects significant in American history. Membership includes a subscription to the *Historic Preservation* magazine. To join, call (800) 944-6847 or e-mail members@nthp.org.

The authors wish to thank the following individuals for their careful review of this guide: Robin Bodo, Product Advisor, Delaware State Historic Preservation Office; Frank McKelvey, Jr., Vice Chairman, New Castle County Historic Review Board; Wade Catts, New Castle County Historic Review Board; Lu Ann De Cunzo, Department of Anthropology, University of Delaware; and Rebecca Siders, Center for Historic Architecture and Design, University of Delaware.