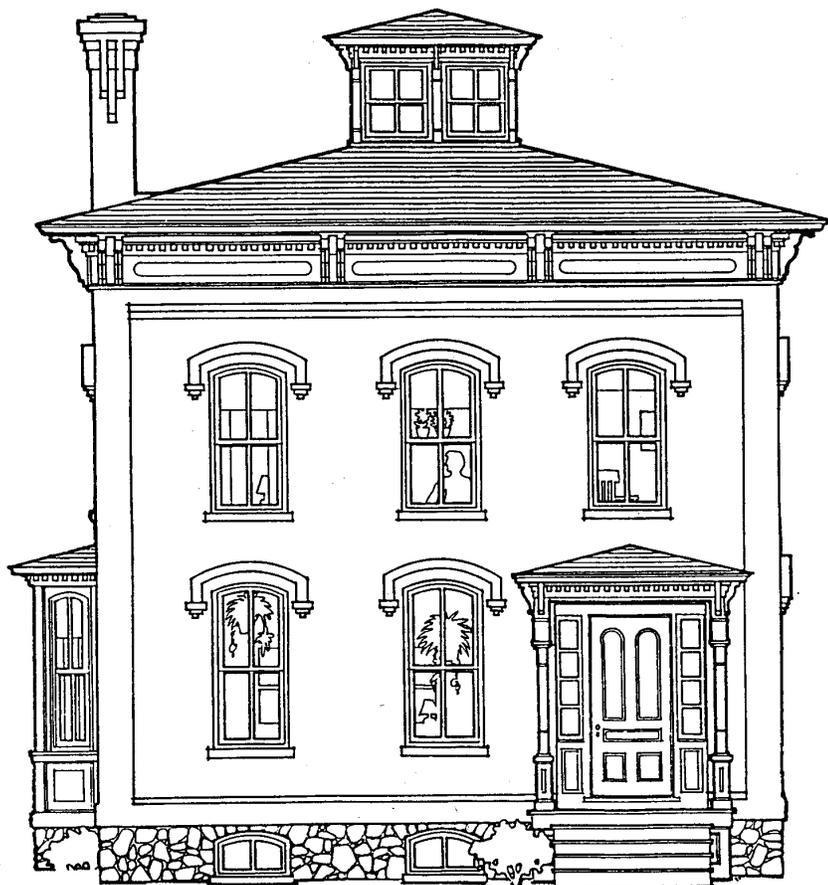


The Roots of Your House

A Guide to Historic Resources in Rock Island



Prepared by the
Rock Island Preservation Commission
&
Rock Island Planning & Redevelopment Division

Table of Contents

Discovering Your House	p. 3
Documentary Resources and Primary Research.....	p. 3
City Directories	p. 3
Historic Street Names	p. 4
Abstract of Title	p. 6
Deed Research.....	p. 6
Other Governmental Records	p. 7
Pictorial Research.....	p. 7
Sanborn Maps	p. 8
Bird's-Eye Views	p. 8
Newspapers.....	p. 9
Secondary Library Resources	p. 10
Libraries Listing.....	p. 10
Rock Island Preservation Commission Publications.....	p. 12
Historical Albums of Rock Island.....	p. 13
Books to Help You Identify and Restore Old Buildings.....	p. 13
Internet Resources	p. 14

*Rock Island.....
Preserving the Past,
Dedicated to the Future.*

Discovering Your House *

"How old is it?", "Who lived there?", and "Who built it?"

When discussing any older structure, these three questions come to mind. People, now more than ever, are interested in their "roots" to the past. The most tangible "roots" connecting people's todays and yesterdays are the buildings around us. Most people receive great satisfaction when those "roots" are uncovered and understood. Unfortunately, uncovering and understanding these "roots" can be difficult. Though the resources to understand those "roots" are all around us, most people do not know about them, much less how to use them. The most common resources used to discover your house are City Directories, Title Abstracts, Deeds, Pictorial Resources, Sanborn Maps, Newspapers, and finally, Libraries. This booklet will tell you how to use these resources to discover your house.

Documentary Resources And Primary Research

Documentary research depends upon the location of a house. Houses located in cities generate more data than rural or small town houses, and thus are more likely to appear in a variety of records.

It is doubtful that all of the following sources of information will be of value on each house researched. In all likelihood, no one structure will appear in all of the following resources. However, any house should appear in some of them. It really does not matter in which order the following resources are researched. The optimal order of research will vary for each structure researched. What is important to remember is that after all research resources have been thoroughly used, all important information needed to understand your house should be at hand.

City Directories

The best place to begin researching an urban house is the City Directory. Directories have been published for Illinois communities since the 1840's, and complete sets may be found at public libraries and historical societies. Using a directory is, essentially, a matter of working backwards. Beginning in the 1880's, street indexes were included in city directories. These indexes list occupants by street address and indicate (usually) whether it was an individual dwelling unit or a house.

* House and building are used synonymously throughout this booklet.

A typical entry reads, "20th Street; 1020; Rinck, Fredric C.*". One now knows the house's occupant and the asterisk indicates that Rinck told the canvasser that he owned the house. To find out Rinck's occupation, one simply checks the alphabetical listing of names where it reads: "Rinck, Fredric C. (Luella) Business Manager, Rock Island Daily Union -r 1020 20th Street." That entry informs us that he had a spouse named Luella, a good job, and lived at a house at 1020 20th Street.

By starting with the most recent directory and working backwards, one can develop a complete list of occupants at a single address. Occupancy, or lack of occupancy, is often associated with house building or major remodeling. Sometimes that search will yield an accurate construction date. If the structure appears on the earliest street index, the alphabetical index must be used. In that case, the name of the person, rather than the address, is traced. One can often extend the date of occupancy at a single address, sometimes to the date of construction. Abbreviations are commonly used in the city directories, especially the early editions. For instance, "r" means "residence" or "bds" means boards. Most are easy to interpret, but look for a chart to the abbreviations at the beginning of the directory.

The Rock Island Public Library (401 19th Street, Rock Island) contains microfilm copies of City Directories dating back to 1890. The Augustana College Library (3435 9 ½ Avenue, Rock Island), the Rock Island County Historical Society Library (822 11th Avenue, Moline), and the Moline Public Library (504 17th Street, Moline) contain original copies of City Directories dating back to 1858.

Historic Street Names

Rock Island suffers from an unusual difficulty that concerns directory research. That difficulty stems from the fact that the present street name system dates back to only 1877. If the property that you are researching was built after 1877, its address probably remained the same throughout its life and this difficulty would not apply to you. The present numbered avenue/numbered street system was preceded by a system in which all streets were named. It was a haphazard system that developed as the city grew. By 1877 there was no order or reason to the naming of the streets. In fact, some streets, such as what is now First Avenue, had different names for different segments of the same street. By 1877 it was necessary to adopt a numbered street system in order to make sense out of the growth of the City and to make finding particular addresses possible.

In order to determine what street your house was on prior to 1877, you must check the following chart. (The Rock Island City Directories for 1877,

1878 and 1879 contain similar charts showing the old street names and their new names.)

When researching a property built prior to 1877, it will be necessary to consult this chart to find the old name of the street the property is on. By doing this, you should be able to trace a property across the street name change.

Present And Past Names of Rock Island Streets		
<u>Streets</u>		29 th Columbia, 29 th
		30 th Elm
1 st Pike, Pine		31 st Andrews
2 nd St. Clair		32 nd Kimbal, 32 nd
3 rd Monroe		38 th Robbins, College
4 th Carroll		Avenue
5 th Huron		42 nd Sylvan, Walnut
6 th Main		43 rd Francis
7 th Pearl		45 th Brooks Avenue
8 th Ontario		
9 th Exchange	<u>Avenues</u>	
10 th Ohio	1 st	Mississippi, Water, Front
11 th Swan	2 nd	Illinois
12 th Otter	3 rd	Orleans
13 th Beaver, Short	4 th	Rock River
14 th Deer, Stoddard	5 th	Moline Avenue, Highland, Canal
15 th Elk	6 th	Commercial, Commerce, Pleasant, Green Gable, Grove, Sherman
16 th Buffalo	7 th	Toledo, Spencer, 7 th
18 th Washington	8 th	Barnard, Harper
19 th Jefferson, Cherry	8 1/2	Clark
20 th Madison	9 th	Indian Boundary, Prospect, 9 th
21 st Adams	9 1/2	Toledo, Union
22 nd Dock	11 th	Atkinson
23 rd Broadway		
24 th Arsenal		
25 th Davenport, Keokuk		
26 th Stickney, Railroad		
27 th Howard Avenue		
28 th 28 th		

In addition, there was an 11th Avenue designation in the Broadway Historic District that was changed to 12th Avenue.

Abstract of Title

Whether rural or urban, a house sits on land. Land ownership and related issues are so important that businesses, called abstract companies, have been established to assist an owner in proving ownership. It is the abstract company's business to provide a chain of title proving that a property being purchased is held free and clear by the seller. Although that system has largely been replaced by title insurance, it is still worthwhile to see if an abstract was prepared. It is important to remember that abstracts record only the land, not the buildings on it. It is useful, however, in determining construction dates because change in land ownership is often associated with building construction and remodeling. In addition, a warranty deed is granted at the time of sale. Revenue stamps on the warranty deed can approximate the property price since one stamp was roughly equivalent to \$1,000. On the same date as the warranty deed, or shortly thereafter, a mortgage is usually granted for a larger amount of money. This can imply a structure is going to be built. Copies of abstracts are often held by current or previous owners and the mortgagor.

Deed Research

A chain of title can be established by performing the same research as an abstract company. That is done by reviewing all legal transfers of property and encumbrances. Since recording those transfers is a function of county government, that information may be found at the Rock Island County Recorder of Deeds Office. In smaller counties, the record is kept by the County Clerk's Office.

All transfers of property are indexed by grantee (buyer) or grantor (seller). Since each buyer is eventually a seller, and both parties are indexed at each transfer, it is possible to trace ownership of the property back to the county's organization.

When using the grantee/grantor index it is necessary to use the deed reference in the index. Only by reading the deed's property description can one be sure that the deed is to the property being researched. One must know the legal description of a property to use deed records. Legal descriptions of property change as land is subdivided.

Deeds and mortgages filed with the county recorder can also yield information on previous land owners since wills and other legal instruments are filed with the deeds. Another reason to use the deeds is that early deeds occasionally had brief descriptions of standing buildings.

The Rock Island County Recorder of Deeds Office is located in the

County Courthouse (200 15th Street, Rock Island). The office contains site files of properties dating back to the mid-1920's, and grantor/grantee indexes of deeds dating back to 1851. It is important to remember that the grantor/grantee index is divided into two volumes, those transactions occurring between 1912 and the change over to the site files in 1925 are in one set of books, and those occurring between 1851 and 1912 are in a separate set of books. If the chain of ownership is lost in one of the volumes, it is necessary to check the other set of books to pick it up.

Other Governmental Records

Townships and municipalities maintain records useful to the researcher. Because of the number of local governmental units, it is difficult to make a general statement on their age and location. In some instances, township assessors maintain the township's assessment records. In other places, a county supervisor of assessments provides that service. In Rock Island, most records are kept at either the County Courthouse (200 15th Street) or the Rock Island County Administration Building (1504 3rd Avenue); the Rock Island Township Office (2827 7th Avenue); the South Rock Island Township Office (1019 27th Avenue); or the Blackhawk Township Office (230 West 4th, Milan). These offices should be able to provide a legal description of the property when given the address.

Assessors' offices maintain property record cards that provide the data for property tax assessment. A property record card contains an outline of structures, describes structural systems, heating systems, and the like, that add to the value of the structure being taxed. Record cards have been commonly used for thirty years, and in some counties much longer. Although municipalities issue building permits, they are usually retained for no longer than five years. For that reason city records that show sewer connections and construction may be useful. Those records usually appear in town council proceedings, and they are useful when researching areas developed at a single time. Municipal engineering or planning offices are often treasure troves of old maps and plats.

Unfortunately, the City of Rock Island is one of those cities that did not retain building permits. However, both the Engineering Division and Planning and Redevelopment Division contain useful plats. Both of these offices are located in the City Hall (1528 Third Avenue, Rock Island).

Pictorial Research

Full exploitation of documentary resources should yield a date, or probable date of construction, but that date needs to be verified through pictorial

sources. Photos and drawings, carefully studied, provide much information on the house and its site. The Rock Island County Historical Society Library (822 11th Avenue, Moline, Illinois) contains an excellent collection of historical photographs and maps.

The City of Rock Island conducted a residential housing survey of most of the city's pre-1940 neighborhoods in the mid-1980's. Exterior photographs of residences were part of this survey. The survey sheets are available for viewing at Rock Island City Hall, Planning and Redevelopment Division, 1528 3rd Avenue.

Sanborn Maps

As in the case of documentary sources, pictorial sources are far more common for urban houses. The most common representative view, or footprint, of a house is recorded on Sanborn Insurance maps, the best single source of information on older structures. Used in setting fire insurance rates, the maps were drawn for more than five hundred Illinois towns, cities, and villages. The maps date from the early 1880's and there were five or six maps for most communities dating to at least the 1930's. Porches, roofing materials, outbuildings, construction type, and other features are shown. A researcher can often determine not only an accurate date of construction, but clearly see the changes that a building has undergone. Augustana College Library (3435 9 ½ Avenue, Rock Island) contains Sanborn Maps of the City of Rock Island on microfilm.

Bird's-Eye Views

In the nineteenth century, itinerant lithographers and town promoters hit upon a happy collaboration. The lithographers sent artists into a community to sketch each structure, and using the principles of perspective, those sketches, (all from one view) were transferred to a bird's-eye view. Those perspective drawings are usually so accurate that the house shape, porch configuration, and window arrangement are discernible. Bird's-eye views were popular from the 1860's to the 1890's.

There are at least four views of Rock Island (1844, 1864, ca. 1874, and 1884). Verifying the date or existence of a structure at a given time is the greatest value of these views. These can be found at the Rock Island County Historical Society Library, 822 11th Avenue, Moline. An example is on the next page.



Example of a bird's-eye view map.

Newspapers

Information from the sources above will yield enough data to research newspapers. Many Illinois newspapers, (including all Quad City area newspapers) are available on microfilm. Obituaries of former house owners can lead to descendants who may have photographs of the structure. Also, details of a past owner's life may lead to information about construction activity. Births, marriages, and deaths were often the motivation for building.

Some newspapers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

published a yearly summary of new buildings as testimony to the community's economic health. Those lists usually appeared in late December or early January. If one knows the date of construction, local newspapers can be read for that year for valuable tidbits of information found in local "gossip" columns. A collection of year-end *Rock Island Argus* newspapers are available for viewing at Rock Island City Hall, Planning and Redevelopment Division.

The search of written records can be a time-consuming, eyestraining task, yet the details it can yield will assist you in placing a house in a temporal context. Although much information not directly related to a particular structure is uncovered, those random facts will provide the historical and cultural context for a house.

The Rock Island Public Library (401 19th Street, Rock Island), Augustana College Library (3435 9 ½ Avenue, Rock Island) and the Rock Island County Historical Society Library (822 11th Avenue, Moline) contain microfilm copies of area newspapers dating to 1855. The Rock Island County Historical Society Library also contains bound copies of area newspapers.

Secondary Library Resources

The library contains some information that is the most general information, histories of the town or the region, that you would use to research your house. It also contains information that is the most specific information, biographies or neighborhood histories, that you would need to research your house.

You would search library resources to get a rough idea of where to begin your document search. After the document search has revealed most of the information on your house, a return trip to the library would be in order to seek out detailed information. This way you can glean all of the information on your house that is possible. Thus the library is both the starting and the ending point of your house research.

A bibliography of some of the more broad research materials used to begin your search and where to find them are as follows:

Rock Island Public Library
401 19th Street, Rock Island, IL
732-7341 (Reference Desk)

Please consult the reference librarian for the following resources:

1. City Directories dating back to 1876
2. Historical file -Material filed under "Historical Homes"
3. Historical file -Material about Rock Island citizens

4. Rock Island Argus -Indexes back to 1855. Year end issues list construction during that year.
5. Obituary file -Index to obituaries found in the Argus from 1855
6. Old plat maps
7. Historical collection -Books on the history of the City of Rock Island and Rock Island County
8. Architectural collection -Books on historic preservation and architecture
9. Postcard collection - Historical scenes and buildings specific to this area

Rock Island County Historical Society Library

822 11th Avenue, Moline, IL

764-8590

(Open Wed - Sat / holidays may vary)

1. Rock Island newspapers from 1839 to 1960
2. Photographic and postcard collection
3. Interview records of Rock Island County Pioneers
4. Old maps and atlases of the City of Rock Island and Rock Island County
5. Vertical file of several subject groups and surnames listed in central card catalog (e.g., Housing, Housing-Historical)
6. State historical publications

Blackhawk Genealogical Society Library

Located at Rock Island Public Library

401 19th Street, Rock Island, Illinois

732-7341 (Reference Desk)

1. Rock Island County Cemetery records
2. Obituary records of Rock Island County newspapers
3. Index to Centennial Families of Rock Island County
4. References on "how to do genealogical research"

Please note that most libraries have genealogical collections.

Augustana College Library (Special Collections room)

Augustana College

3435 9 ½ Avenue, Rock Island, IL

794-7317

Please consult the reference librarian for the following resources:

1. Books on the history of Rock Island County (see "Upper Mississippi Valley Collection")
2. Historical albums of Rock Island and the Quad City area
3. Sanborn insurance maps dated 1886, 1892, 1898, 1906 (on microfilm)

Rock Island County Recorder of Deeds Office

Rock Island County Court House
200 15th Street, Rock Island, IL
786-4451

1. Real estate records that include the legal description and grantee/grantor transactions beginning December 30, 1835
2. Records of mortgages beginning in 1838
3. Servicemen's discharge records beginning June 17, 1865

Rock Island Preservation Commission Publications

Walking and Driving Tour Brochures & Booklets

Historical Highlights of Augustana College
Broadway Historic District
Chicago Addition Walking Tour
Downtown Rock Island
Highland Park Historic District
KeyStone Neighborhood Driving Tour
John Looney Legend Tour
A Walking Tour of 1918 Government Housing
Park View Addition Walking Tour
Rock Island's Modernistic Architecture
Spencer Place / 19th Street Walking Tour
Stroll These Sidewalks: Rock Island's Historic Neighborhoods
20th Street Walking Tour
22nd & 23rd Streets Walking Tour

Rock Island History & Architecture

150 Years of Epitaphs at Chippiannock Cemetery
Rock Island History: A Companion to the Architectural Walking Tours
Rock Island's Historic Residential Neighborhoods, 1835 - 1955
United States Housing Corporation Houses: A Neighborhood Historic Preservation Plan
The Roots of Your Landscape
Speaker Transcripts: "Historic Landscaping for the Urban Lot"
A Collection of Illinois and Iowa Nursery Catalogs and Price Lists: 1857-1927
Residential Design Guidelines for Rock Island Historic Districts and Landmarks
New Homes in Old Rock Island: House Plan Booklet
Brick Streets Plan

The Rock Island Preservation Commission also maintains copies of nominations for all Rock Island Landmarks and National Register of Historic Places buildings and districts in the City. For information call the Rock Island Planning & Redevelopment Division at 732-2900 or visit www.rigov.org.

Historical Albums of Rock Island

(available for review at the Special Collections section of Augustana College Library)

Album of the City of Davenport, Rock Island, Moline and the Rock Island Arsenal. 1890. 917.7339A115.

Album of Rock Island and Vicinity. 917.7339A1151.

Souvenir of the Tri-Cities. 1901. 917.7339P589.

Rock Island and its Surroundings. 1853. 977.339R59c.

Moline, Rock Island, Davenport: Their Interests, Industries, Institutions. 1888. 977.339T465.

Rock Island Illustrated. 1888. 977.339Q29r.

Three Cities and the Rock Island Arsenal. 1884. 977.339T465A.

City of Rock Island, Illinois. 1915. 977.339R59L.

The Tri-City Trade Journal. 1893. 977.339R59T.

Portrait and Biographical Album of Rock Island County, Illinois. 1885. 977.330P838.

Books to Help You Identify And Restore Old Buildings

(available at the Rock Island Public Library and other area libraries)

Bernhard, Sandy. The House Journal: Recording the Challenges of Caring for Your Home. 1993.

Blumenson, John G. Identifying American Architecture—A Pictorial Guide to Syles and Terms, 1600-1945. Revised Edition 1995; 1981.

Brand, Stewart. How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built. 1994.

Combined Book of Sash, Doors, Blinds, Mouldings, Stair Work, Mantels and All Kinds of Interior and Exterior Finish. 1995 (reprint of 1893 catalog).

Gottfried, Herbert and Jan Jennings. American Vernacular Interior Architecture, 1870-1940. 1987.

Greenberg, Gail. A Comprehensive Guide for Listing a Building in the National Register of Historic Places. 1996.

Gross, Steve. Old Houses. 1991.

Gowans, Alan. Styles and Types of North American Architecture. 1992.

Howard, Hugh. How Old Is This House? 1989.

Howard, Hugh. The Preservationist's Progress: Architectural Adventures in Conserving Yesterday's Houses. 1991.

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Residential Architectural Styles in Illinois. [Videorecording]. 1999. Video977.3393Res.

- Jackson, Albert. The Complete Home Restoration Manual: An Authoritative, Do-It-Yourself Guide to Restoring and Maintaining the Older House. 1992.
- Jackson, Kenneth T. Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States. 1985.
- Light, Sally. House Histories: A Guide to Tracing the Genealogy of Your Home. 1989.
- Massey, James C. House Styles in America: The Old House Journal Guide to the Architecture of American Homes. 1996.
- McAlester, Virginia. A Field Guide to American Houses. 1984, 1990, 2000.
- Meany, Terry. Working Windows: A Guide to the Repair and Restoration of Wood Windows. 1998.
- Phillips, Steven J. Old House Dictionary: An Illustrated Guide to American Domestic Architecture, 1600-1940. 1994.
- Picturesque Tri-Cities. 1901-1903. Ref977.3P58.
- Pomada, Elizabeth. The Painted Ladies Revisited: San Francisco's Resplendent Victorians Inside and Out. 1989.
- Pomada, Elizabeth. Daughters of Painted Ladies: America's Resplendent Victorians. 1987.
- Poore, Patricia. The Old House Journal Guide to Restoration. 1992.
- Poppeliers, John. What Style Is It? A Guide to American Architecture. 2003.
- Rooney, William F. Practical Guide to Home Restoration. 1980.
- Rypkema, Donovan. The Economics of Historic Preservation: A Community Leader's Guide. 1994.
- Scully, Vincent J. American Architecture and Urbanism. 1988.
- Smith, G.E. Kidder. A Pictorial History of Architecture in America. 1976.
- Stevenson, Katherine Cole and H. Ward Jandl. Houses By Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck & Co. 1991.
- Victorian Domestic Architectural Plans and Details: 734 Scale Drawings of Doorways, Windows, Staircases, Moldings, Cornices and Other Elements. 1987.
- Vila, Bob. Bob Vila's Complete Guide to Remodeling Your Home. 1999.
- Weitzman, David. Traces of the Past: A Field Guide to Industrial Archeology. 1983.
- Yapp, Bob. About Your House With Bob Yapp. 1997.

Internet Resources

For the most up-to-date listing of handy internet resources related to architecture, state and local history, preservation organizations and tips for historic home owners, go to this page on the City of Rock Island web site:

<http://www.rigov.org/citydepartments/ced/helpfullinks.html>

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Rock Island
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