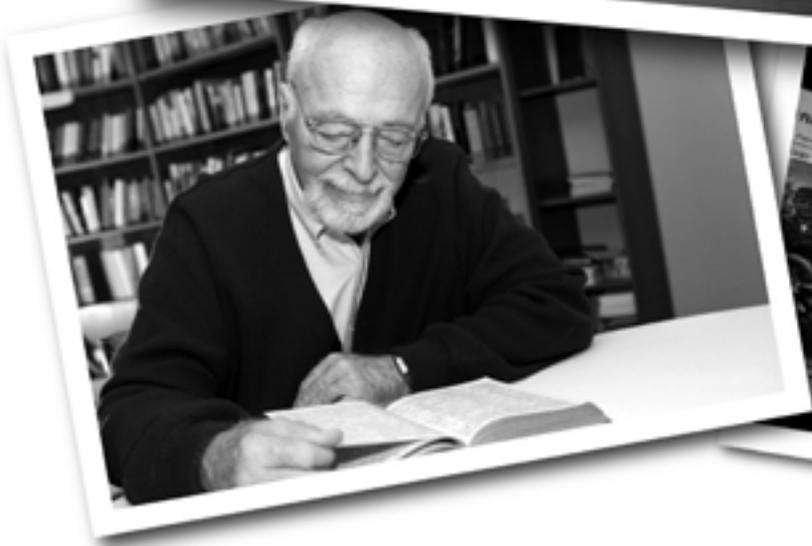




*Houston History Association*

*A Guide to  
Researching  
Your  
Neighborhood History*



# A Guide to Researching Your Neighborhood History

Prepared by the Neighborhood Histories Committee of the Houston History Association

## *Contributors*

Betty Trapp Chapman  
Jo Collier  
Dick Dickerson  
Diana DuCroz  
MJ Figard  
Marks Hinton  
Penny Jones  
Robert Marcom  
Carol McDavid  
Randy Pace  
Gail Rosenthal  
Debra Blacklock Sloan  
Courtney Spillane  
Pam Young

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# **A Guide to Researching Your Neighborhood History**

## **Introduction**

In 2005, Mayor Bill White formed a task force to educate Houstonians about the city's history. The Houston History Association, a 501 (c)(3) organization, grew from that task force's efforts to ensure that all Houstonians are conversant with their common past.

It is the mission of the Houston History Association to promote Houston area history through education, and to serve as a resource for existing historical and civic organizations, educational institutions, and archival groups. We are dedicated to documenting neighborhood histories and inspiring all citizens of greater Houston to learn more about their diverse culture and legacy.

To that end, the members of the HHA Neighborhoods Committee have written *A Guide to Researching Your Neighborhood History*, a step-by-step manual for neighborhoods who wish to research and learn about their past, and to conserve the knowledge of that past for future generations. Inside is information on local historical resources; practical tips on using various research materials; ideas for neighborhood projects; guidelines for preserving historic materials; and instructions for designating historic properties.

We believe that Houstonians who are conversant with their history and especially with the role their own neighborhoods have played in that history will understand how vital it is that we protect the various aspects of our shared past.

## GETTING STARTED

### Why Do a Neighborhood History Project Now?

- To keep alive the neighborhood's distinctive character.
- To develop greater neighborhood awareness, pride and concern for neighborhood preservation.
- To communicate to the young and to newly arrived residents a sense of the community's history and unique character, thus strengthening their ties to the neighborhood.
- To bring together people in the community, particularly across generational and cultural/ethnic lines, who might not otherwise get together.
- To capture the stories and memories of older residents, providing them with a lasting way to contribute to the future of the community.
- To determine if places in the neighborhood, or the neighborhood itself, are worthy of historical designation or site historical markers.

### Some Ideas for a Neighborhood History Project

- Brochure/booklet or other publication
- 'Walking/driving' tour of local landmarks, architecture, notable residents, and/or events
- Oral histories of former and current residents
- Neighborhood history webpage
  - Some local examples:*
    - Independence Heights: <http://indepheights.rice.edu/index.htm>
    - Third Ward: <http://eyeonthirdward.mfah.org/reflections.asp>
    - Memorial Bend: [www.memorialbendarchitecture.com](http://www.memorialbendarchitecture.com)
- Neighborhood history newsletter
- Videos/documentaries
- School curricula
- Displays/exhibits – historic photos, slideshow, art work, scrapbooks, etc.
- Neighborhood archive
- Community art projects – i.e., Fifth Ward mural at Crawford Elementary
- Graphics, such as calendars and Christmas cards
- Genealogy workshop
- Neighborhood History 'Fest' – invite the community, set up a scanner for old photographs, set up an oral history 'booth', storytelling by older residents, etc.
- Historic district designation
- Site historical markers
- Historical signage

### Who can do a Neighborhood History Project?

- Neighborhood/civic organizations and clubs
- Schools
- Scout troops
- Churches
- Super Neighborhood Council
- Veterans groups
- Fraternal organizations
- Families
- Individuals
- Anybody who is interested!

### How to Get Started

- Identify potential participants, partners, and volunteers.

- Bring everyone to the table - invite people you'd like to get involved.
- Articulate the vision of the group.
- Assess the group's interests, talents, available time, and resources.
  - Who can do/contribute what?
  - What outside help/training/materials might be helpful?
  - What resources (i.e., funding, equipment, information sources) are available?
- Determine the scope of the project.
  - Geographical scope – i.e., what is the 'neighborhood'?
  - Time frame for the project
- Choose a project – better to start small in the beginning! Break down more ambitious projects into smaller pieces.
- Make a plan, set goals (break each goal into 3-5 doable steps), develop a timetable and set a target completion date.
- Delegate tasks among all group members – this keeps everyone involved in the project, and avoids overburdening a few members.
- Keep in contact with members between meetings – an email list helps a lot.
- Publicize your group – this gives you credibility in the community and attracts new participants.
- Completion of the project – plan a community event to celebrate and share results!

### **Historical Resources**

The greatest historical resource is neighborhood citizens. In addition to their memories and stories about the neighborhood, long-time residents and their descendants frequently have photographs, scrapbooks, family bibles, personal diaries, and other items that have a historical significance.

Other sources of local historical information:

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| • Houston Metropolitan Research Center,<br>Julia Ideson Building, Houston Public<br>Library | • Land maps/titles/deeds       |
| • Clayton Library Center for Genealogical<br>Research                                       | • University archives/faculty  |
| • Branch libraries  | • Senior centers               |
| • Church and school archives  | • Local veterans groups        |
| • Community publications and newspapers   | • Local experts and historians |
| • County/city records   |                                |

The most important step is to begin, then to share your discoveries with the rest of the community!

## RESEARCH TOOLS AND TIPS FOR USING LOCAL RESOURCES

### Introduction

This section is to familiarize researchers with what can be found locally to help them in developing a history of their neighborhood. The Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) of the Houston Public Library (HPL) is an example of a research facility with local materials. It is located in the Julia Ideson Building at 500 McKinney. There are other research facilities in the Houston area, but to clarify this particular section the HMRC will be used here.

### Getting Started

Check out the facility where you are going to do research. Check their hours and call ahead to make sure they are not going to be closed for renovations or any special occasion. If their holdings are listed on-line, take time to note what you might be interested in seeing. To access HPL's online catalog, go to <http://www.hpl.lib.tx.us>. Materials not in the catalog will be recorded in finding aids and the librarian can direct you to those. Often these are materials that are on microfilm, in vertical files, and in archival collections. If you already know topics for which you want to discover information, make notes ahead of time so that you will have somewhere to begin your research.

When you arrive at your destination (in this case, the Texas Room in the Julia Ideson Building), you will be asked to put most of your belongings (purse, briefcase, etc.) in a locker where they will remain locked while you conduct your research. You will be allowed to keep your laptop computer and a notepad. The library will furnish you with pencils. Be sure to have small bills and change for the copying machine. Do not expect the librarian to change large bills for you.

Introduce yourself to a librarian. Explain to that person what you are doing. Research centers are closed-stack, non-circulating facilities, so most of the materials must be brought out to you by the staff. First, ask if there are any materials on your specific neighborhood. If you are lucky, there may be a file, usually of newspaper articles. These can be a beginning. Read them carefully for clues on where to search further. For example, if the neighborhood was established in 1910, it will be helpful to discover what was happening in the community at that time. Had the city limits been expanded? Was the city experiencing a building boom or an increase in population? Had a new school or park been built nearby? It is important to place your neighborhood within the historical context of its city and state. Remember, you are not only trying to find out what happened, but how and why, as well.

### Research Materials

- Books – With particular strength in history, biography and the social sciences, the collections in the Texas Room also include rare, early Texas imprints; theses and dissertations; privately published works of local interest; and works from Texas authors and Texas presses.
- Periodicals – Magazines of both general and scholarly interest date from the 1800s to the present. Newsletters represent a broad range of local and state organizations. Nineteenth and early twentieth century newspapers from many Texas cities and towns can be viewed on microfilm. Unfortunately, the newspapers prior to 1976 are not indexed so you must scan them looking for articles that might be related to your subject. This is time consuming, but you will likely find information you were not even looking for. Newspaper clippings are

maintained in a Vertical File under the names of individuals and under subject headings relevant to Houston.

- Maps – More than 1500 maps illustrate the development of Houston and Texas. The Texas maps begin with the Spanish colonial period. Houston maps begin with the first hand-drawn map of the new city of Houston in 1836. City maps reflect the expansion of Houston's city limits and the presence of neighborhoods.

Supplementing these are sets of aerial photographs beginning in 1935. There are also microfilmed Sanborn insurance maps for Houston. These maps indicate the type of structure on a property (commercial or residential), its composition, and its footprint. (See Archaeology Section for detailed information on the Sanborn maps).

- Photographic Collections – Consisting of more than 3.5 million images of Houston from its nineteenth century beginning to the present, the collection visually records all aspects of Houston's growth. A segment of the component is catalogued and available for research. The remainder may be used by appointment. Copies of a photograph can be obtained for a fee.
- Architectural Component – The architectural component documents Houston's built environment. Architectural drawings, which number approximately 125,000, comprise the largest segment of the collection. Landscape, interior, and engineering plans, as well as architectural photographs, are also included. The materials in this component are available by appointment.
- Manuscript Collections – HMRC collects non-current records of businesses, community and civic organizations, religious institutions, and other public or private groups which have influenced Houston's development. These collections consist of the private papers and records of persons who helped shape the city's history. On deposit are the collections of civic leaders, businessmen, educators, politicians, and professional people. An inventory of these holdings is available at the front desk. The librarian will assist you with this.

The African American component – This documents Houston's black community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and adds vital insight into the city's history. African American collections emphasize prominent individuals, long-established families, churches, black newspapers, cultural groups, community institutions, and business/labor activities.

The Mexican American component – This documents the explosive growth of Houston's Mexican American community after 1910 and the preservation of a distinct cultural heritage through the records of community organizations, individuals and families, business and political activities, and social/cultural events.

- Oral History – An oral history component provides information not available through written sources. The collection consists of reminiscences and analyses of events from persons who have a firsthand knowledge of significant political, cultural, and economic events in the growth of metropolitan Houston. Access to the oral history component is by appointment.
- Other Materials – These include copies of old telephone directories, city directories for Houston dating back to 1884 (with a few earlier ones), school and college yearbooks, just to name a few. The City Directories will be especially valuable. They contain an alphabetical listing of all residents with such information as their name, address, occupation, race, number of children, and whether they own their home or rent it. After 1912 each volume contained a

separate section by street names, alphabetically listed. This makes it easy to find the streets in your neighborhood in any given year and know exactly who lived there. They also contain advertisements, listings of clubs, schools, churches, and other helpful information (see the section on ‘How to Research the History of a Building’ for more information on using City Directories). U. S. Census reports for Texas are available on Ancestry.com by using a library computer. This is another source for determining who lived in your neighborhood.

### **Gathering and Organizing Notes**

- How do you know when information is important enough to include in your notes? Make a list of questions beforehand (i.e. When was the neighborhood established? Who developed it? How did the streets get their name? Who lived in the neighborhood? Where were the schools? What were the occupations of the residents? What kind of transportation did the residents use? Were there special neighborhood events during the year?) As you find answers to these questions and other similar ones, you will begin to weave the threads of your story together.
- Background reading is essential. Find at least three sources that can acquaint you with your city and its history. Your neighborhood is part of the city and your research should reflect that reality. (See the Bibliography in this manual for suggested books on Houston.)
- How do you know when a source is a reliable one? Look at the bibliographies in each book, usually found in the back. That will indicate where the author found his/her information and it may also lead you to other sources. If the book has footnotes, scan them for the same reason. In evaluating a source, use these criteria: competence of the source, objectivity and impartiality, and the closeness of the source to the event in time and space.
- Your notes can be organized however they make the most sense to you. You can organize them by subject (i.e. people, events, houses, etc.) or you can organize them chronologically if you want to create a time-line. If you are taking notes on paper, you can transfer them to either index cards, which can be filed, or to a ring notebook, where you can organize them. If you are using a laptop, you can still organize your information in this same manner on your computer.
- Remember to write down the source (title, author, and page number) for each note. It is also helpful to put the library’s call number from the book’s spine and the name of the library in case you need to find it again at a later date.
- It is better to paraphrase information instead of directly quoting it, but if you use a direct quote be sure it is accurate and give the source in your final work.

### **Conclusion**

If you have never engaged in extensive research, the process may sound complicated and confusing. As you delve into it, however, it will begin to come together. It is like being on a treasure hunt with each new piece of information taking you closer to the treasure – the history of your neighborhood. Just be sure to enjoy the hunt!

## HOW TO RESEARCH THE HISTORY OF A BUILDING

### Introduction

Researching the history of a building, including your own home, can be an interesting and worthwhile project. You may wish to research the history of a building in order to apply for National Register or City Landmark historic designation. Historic building research is also helpful to do before starting a restoration project. Restoring a building in keeping with its original style and tradition honors the history of the building, and is the best way to guarantee long-term market value of the property and to promote its historical significance.

In researching the history of a building, you will be looking for answers to a few basic questions: Who built the house or building? When was it built? What style is it? What did the building originally look like on the inside and outside? Who were the previous owners and residents?

Below are a few suggestions to enable you to begin to compile information that is available. Although there are several methods that can be used to determine prior owners, you will need to determine your own best approach, depending on how much time and money you want to add on your research.

### Deeds

Every time a property is sold, a record is made of the transaction at the county. By searching these records back in time, you can obtain a list of each previous owner of your property and the date of purchase. Start by checking your Deed of Trust for the exact legal description of your property, such as 'Lot 4, Block 156, Houston Heights Addition, Houston, Harris County, Texas.' You are the Buyer/Grantee, and the seller from whom you bought the property is the Grantor. You will save a lot of time if you can determine the name of the earliest known owner and the years in which he owned your property. Harris County Appraisal District records (available online at [www.hcad.org](http://www.hcad.org)) can also give you clues about your legal description, and lists ownership history of the property back to 1988.

Historic deed records are a very good source of information. They are available at the Harris County Clerk Archives (the "Coffee Pot Building" at 102 San Jacinto). When you get to the archives, ask the clerk where the Deed Index books are located. The deed records are organized in two ways: by seller ('grantor') and buyer ('grantee'). The indexes are grouped by time periods and are in alphabetical order by last name. If you have the name of the individual who sold the home, look up the deed in the Direct, or Grantor, Deed Index book. If you have the name of the individual who purchased the building, look up the deed in the Indirect, or Grantee, Index book. At the very top of each page in the index books you will see an alphabetical list in several short columns. This list further alphabetizes the records by first name, and tells which page will begin the index by given name. For example, the last names (surnames) of JONES, JOHNSON, JOHNSTON, JACKSON will be in the deed index book for 'J', but the 'J' section is further divided into sections by the first two letters of the first name. For example, all the individuals named William with a last name starting with 'J' will be found under 'Wi' regardless of last name ('William Jones' and 'William James' would be found in same section.) Each section is further organized chronologically. Once you locate the name in the Deed Index book, look at the right hand margin for the property description. If your property description does not appear, this deed may not have affected your property so continue looking through the book. Adjacent to the

property description are columns listing the volume and page number of the Deed Records Book where your deed is located.

Once you locate this information, you are ready to retrieve the actual deed from the deed books. Again, ask the clerk where these books are located. These books are organized by volume number, with some volumes separated into more than one book.

The Harris County Clerk's office also has online records of deeds beginning in 1960. Their website is <http://www.cclerk.hctx.net/>. Click, "Search databases," Click, "Real Property." Type in the last name of the person you bought the home from as the "Grantee," and work your way backwards.

### **Abstract of Title**

If you are the building owner, check through all the papers you received at the time you purchased the building for any mention of prior owners and the dates they owned the property. The Title Company may have furnished you with an abbreviated Abstract of Title. You can call them and ask what records they have. Not all title companies can furnish you with this information, so don't despair if you get a negative response from them.

An alternative approach is to consult one of the abstracting companies, listed in the yellow pages under "abstractors". Ask the company to check your property description and give you an estimate for the cost of providing the abstract index back to the earliest date in their records. Copies of the actual deed would be considerably more expensive. If you use the abstract company services, you will receive the names of the grantors (sellers) and grantees (buyers) of your property, the dates of the conveyance, and the book and page references where the conveyance is recorded in the Harris County records. Although this will not tell you the name of the earliest owner of your property, it will give you the name of an owner at some past date from which you can begin your research. More explanation about this follows below under "Courthouse Records".

Harris County maintains Abstracts of Title in its archives on the 12th Floor of the Criminal Justice Center at 1201 Franklin Avenue. Its collection of Abstracts of Title is far from complete so call or visit their website to see if they have yours.

### **Probate Records**

Although deed records are probably the most useful for historic building research, property can be transferred from one owner to the next by other means, including inheritance laws, bequeaths in a will, or tax sales. If you have trouble finding deed records showing a transfer of ownership, check the Probate Record for distribution of your property. There is a Probate Records Index at the Harris County Clerk Archives (similar to the Deed Index). You will need to know the name of the deceased and approximate year of death. Wills or estate inventories recorded in the county records often contain a lot of good information. Ask the clerk about the location of the Probate Records for the year you seek and follow the same instructions for locating deeds via index books described above under 'Deeds.'

### **City Directory**

Old Houston City Directories are one of the most useful sources of information for historic building research, and can be found at the Julia Ideson Building, Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC). Sign in at the desk and ask to see the city directories. The Texas Room has city

directories spanning the years from 1866-1986. (The HMRC does not have Houston City Directories for 1916, 1933, or 1938.)

City directories are an index by street address and/or name of the person who resided at that address for the year of the directory. Prior to 1912, you must know the name of the person who resided at your address to consult city directories since they were not cross-listed by address prior to this time. This is a good way to 'date' your house. By working backwards or forwards from the year you find your particular street address listed, you can determine possibly when the house was constructed or first occupied. However, be prepared for omissions and errors. Just because your address does not appear in a city directory for a particular year, it does not mean your house did not exist in that year. Remember that the person residing at the address is not necessarily the owner.

City directories have an 'abbreviation index' in the front for the abbreviations used. Be sure to consult this abbreviation index. Some abbreviations used may include the following: 'r' meaning resided (owner), 'h' meaning home (non-owner), 'o' meaning owner, or 'b' meaning boarder (non-owner), etc. However, the meaning may not be the same for all years. Take the time to check to be sure. If you use early city directories, there were not many residences, perhaps only one house in some blocks. For instance, an address may be given as between 15th and 16th on the west side of Heights Boulevard. Also, some houses have been moved from their original location or destroyed by fire and replaced. Neighbors may be able to help here. A note of caution: some street names have been changed (ex. Boulevard to Heights Boulevard; Lowell to Shepherd; parts of Nashua to Durham; Portland to Tulane; Railroad to Nicholson; etc). Remember, that just because a neighborhood is part of the City of Houston today, does not necessarily mean that it was part of the City in the directory in which you are searching.

One more thing about the city directories: Houston Heights and Brunner (in what is now called 'West End') were cities separate from Houston from 1892-1918. For the years 1908-1910, the street number index for these areas is in a separate section from Houston in the front of the book. However, if you know the name of the individual who lived at your residence, even though he lived in Houston Heights or Brunner, he will be included in the section of the Alpha index with Houston residents. Houston Heights and Brunner will be given after the address shown.

Typically, little time lag existed between the year of building completion and year of directory listing. For example, if your house first appears in the 1936 directory, it was likely built in 1935 or 1936. If, however, you do not find it listed in the directory by address in the year constructed, remember the margin for error. The city directories were published based on questionnaires completed by residents, who may not have listed complete information. Not all individuals had phones. Be sure to record all the names of the persons you find at your address. Then look up their name in the section for residents. Here, you may find out the names of others living with the individual, such as wife, children, boarders, their occupations, and phone number. You may also be given the name of the company where the individual worked. If you check this name you will determine possibly the type of business and you can then look in the Index of Advertisements in the front of the Directory to see if that particular business featured an ad. Even if the resident turns out not to be the owner, it is interesting to find out who they were since they also contributed to the history of your house.

Some of the individuals who lived in your house may have become or were prominent and important people. Perhaps you can locate biographical information about the person. Clayton Library for Genealogical Research is the best place to do this type of research. Clayton Library is

part of the Houston Public Library and located at 5300 Caroline Street. If, during the course of your research, you realize the need to access City Directories from cities other than Houston, the Clayton Library has them for many cities across the country. More on Clayton Library will be discussed later.

## **U.S. Census**

To find out more about the people who lived in your house, check the U. S. Census records for their surname. These records can be found at the Clayton Library and on the internet at Ancestry.com and Heritage Quest Online. At the Clayton Library, a soundex (index) was prepared for individuals found in the census for 1900, 1910, and 1920. The census year for 1930 is the last year currently available for public viewing. Information shown on the 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 census included names, ages and sex for all people in the household, marital status and number of years married, place of birth (State), place of birth of parents (State), questions involving occupation, wealth, health and education. The census for 1910, 1920, and 1930 shows the street names with the house address, although the 1900 census does not. The census record also shows the status of the resident as owner or renter as well.

Once you have the names of the children of the owner or renter, you can check telephone directories for possible descendants. You may find a descendent with a great deal of information, maybe even an abstract of the property. They may know who built the building and even have pictures of it in their family album.

Another way to access U.S. Census records is via the internet. The Houston Public Library offers free access for library card holders to Heritage Quest, which maintains census records from 1790–1930. Heritage Quest enables you to browse the census by state, year, and county, and features original digitized pages from the census. On Ancestry.com you can search the census by entering a surname (and preferably a given name, too) in the search box. The search will then return each census (and other documents, if available) in which that name is featured. Both of these websites are offered free-of-charge to Houston Public Library card holders. Visit the Houston Public Library website and enter Heritage Quest or Ancestry.com in the search box.

## **Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Books**

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Books are an excellent source of information on historic buildings. The Sanborn Company in New York prepared plats of most cities in the U.S. showing street layouts and existing buildings to scale. These maps were used by the insurance companies to determine types of coverage needed and statistics. Sanborn maps shows lots and blocks with exact measurements of building footprints, as well as number of stories, building use, type of construction (wood, brick stone), and other useful historical building information.

Founded in 1867 by D. A. Sanborn, the Sanborn Map Company produced detailed maps of city neighborhoods for underwriters of fire insurance. By 1905, the company established a system of standards for accuracy and design, and by 1920 held a monopoly in the field of fire insurance maps. Due to the expense and size of the maps, limited editions were made of each map and often bought by insurance associations for the use of their members. By 1950, modern construction methods, building codes, and improved fire protection methods made the use of Sanborn Maps increasingly unnecessary. The company soon stopped producing new maps and only provided updates into the early 1960s.

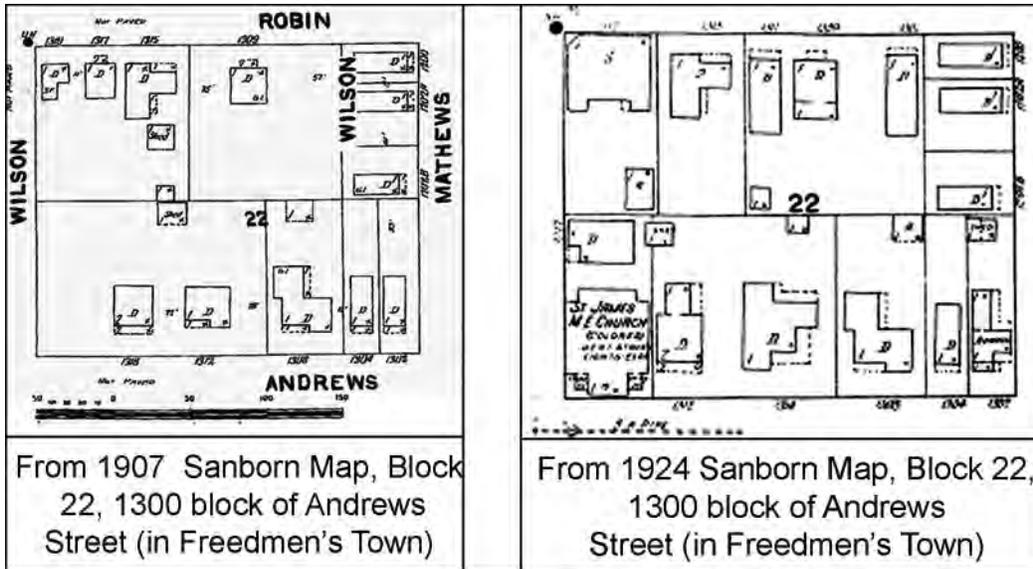
Not all sections of Houston are mapped, nor is a complete local set available. For Houston, there are Sanborn Maps for 1896, 1907, 1924, and 1924 (revised) (the last of these was actually drawn in 1934, and is sometimes referred to as the “1934” map).

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps were hand-drawn, lithographed and then hand-colored on 21-by-25 inch sheets of paper, which were then bound in volumes for sale. A scale of 1 inch to 50 feet allowed for the rendering of precise detail. Buildings were identified by a system of color-coding for building materials and included information such as current use, heating systems, windows, skylights, and building heights. Street widths and materials were noted along with utility lines.

Start by looking in the Index for your street. Although the information found varies a great deal from street to street you may find valuable information, as well as the date changes were made to the buildings on your lot. The street addresses are shown in the volumes.

Sanborn maps are available at the Texas Room in the Julia Ideson Building of the Houston Public Library. Digital copies of the Sanborns can be accessed through the Houston Public Library website if you have a library card. Sanborns are also available at the Harris County Archives and at some university libraries (such as the M.D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston).

Following is an example of what the 1907 and 1924 Sanborn Maps show for the 1300 block of Andrews, in Freedmen’s Town, Houston. The Sanborns have a key that tells you what certain buildings were (“D” means “dwelling”, “A” means “autogarage”, “S” means “Store”, “WC” refers to cisterns and privies). They also show how many stories a structure had as well as other information.



See also the Section on ‘Archaeology and The Historic Home’ for more tips on using Sanborn maps.

### Texas General Contractors Association Monthly Bulletins

This was a monthly publication for the building industry in Texas. The bulletins contain two sections that are useful for historical research of buildings: ‘Prospective Work’ in which planned

buildings are listed by city, then by name of owner or architect; and 'Contracts Awarded' section, in which construction contracts are identified by city, by the name of the contractor, and by name of the building owner. A street address is usually included for Houston buildings.

These bulletins can be found in the Texas Room at the Julia Ideson Library, and range in dates from the mid-1920s to mid-1930s. If the City Directory indicates that your building was built within this time period, consult the issues for that year and the previous year to see if you can find a mention of it. The 'Contracts Awarded' section is usually the more fruitful. A listing here will also tell you whether the house was built by the person who is first listed as living there, or whether it was built by someone else, such as a developer.

## **Newspapers**

Once you have narrowed down your building date of construction, you can try to find mention of the building in the Houston Chronicle's Sunday real estate section found on microfilm at the library. If you found a 'Contracts Awarded' notice for your building in the Texas General Contractors Association Monthly Bulletins (see above), try scanning the microfilm starting the month in advance of the contract date, then proceed week by week for a year to see if you can find notice of when construction was begun or finished. Contractor and architect information may also be included in the newspaper.

## **Tax Records**

Another method to determine who owned a property is to look at early tax records of Harris County. If you know the name of the lot owner, the legal description of the lot, and years he or she owned the lot, you can ask the librarian at the Texas Room (Julia Ideson Library) to order from Austin the tax rolls for the year you need. The rolls are divided into Resident (owner) and Nonresident (owner) sections alphabetically by their name.

Once you find the name of the individual who owned the lot, you can find the property value given to the property. By looking at each successive year, you can see when the property increased in value (either due to appreciation or to new improvements). Other information given for the owner is number of horses, cows, or carriages (wagons) owned. This value is separate from the lot value with improvements.

## **Architecture Reference Books**

You can also consult a reference book on types of architecture, styles, and construction methods, which can help you date your building. After taking good photos of your house, go to the Public Library and compare your house to the examples of houses in the various books. If you know the style of your house, such as Queen Anne, Bungalow, Greek Revival, etc., you can check these particular styles in the card catalog or look under 'Architecture History.' One of the best sources is [A Field Guide to American Houses by Virginia and Lee McAlester](#) (Alfred A. Knopf, 1984). A good website is "Architectural Styles of America" by Dr. Tom Paradis, Northern Arizona University, Associate Professor of Geography, Planning and Recreation: <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~twp/architecture/prairie/index.html>

## **Interview Neighbors**

You can talk to your neighbors or others who have lived on your street and ask them the names of known owners and the approximate dates they lived in your house. Senior citizens often

remember people, historical events, and structures that cannot be found in any record. Your neighbors may not know the names of owners if your house has been rented at different times in the past. Be wary of “neighborhood folklore,” stories that get passed down from neighbor to neighbor, year after year, yet have little factual basis. Check the sidewalks and curb for an owner name that may have been placed there at the time of installation.

## **Conclusion**

The methods of doing research on your house and property are varied and many. In order to find the information you are seeking, it may be necessary for you to try all of these methods, a combination of these, or others we have not even touched upon. Check also with staff at the local archives and library collections for more tips on how to research your historic building.

## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE HISTORIC HOME

When people think about archaeology, they usually think first about the big, famous sites – Chaco Canyon, Machu Picchu, Stonehenge, ancient sites in Greece, Israel, Africa, and the like. There is, however, a lot that can be learned from the average residential yard – archaeologists call it “household archaeology”, and it can tell us a great deal about how people lived their everyday lives in the past. We can learn what consumer decisions people made (what did they buy, use, eat?), how they worked and played, how they used their space, how the surrounding landscape changed through time, and other things about past life. Oftentimes what we learn is different from what written history tells us – archaeology provides a different “lens” to more fully understand the past.

There are some limits, though, to what we can learn from the archaeology of yards. These limits mainly have to do with how much disturbance (from previous construction episodes, for example) that the soil in the yard has had over the years. Therefore, before doing any excavating, archaeologists (and you) can use some *non*-digging tools to predict whether excavation archaeology on any given site would be worthwhile.

First, you need to know when the historic home was built, and if possible, what was built before it (if anything). This information should be on the title search documents that you obtained when purchasing the property, or barring that, from Harris County deed records. You can find those at the Harris County Clerk Archives at 102 San Jacinto Street (see Section on ‘How to Research the History of a Building’ for more detail).

The Houston City Directories can also help you to identify the previous owners of your home. The Texas Room of the Houston Public Library located in the Julia Ideson Library (the home of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center) has microfilmed and published records beginning in 1866 and ending in 1986. The librarians there are very helpful (see Section on ‘How to Research the History of a Building’ for more detail).

Sometimes your neighbors can shed light on interesting facts about your property. Senior citizens often remember people and historical events, structures and landscaping that are not part of any other record. These sorts of histories are often important to archaeologists because they may provide clues that help in reconstructing the past.

Once you have the approximate date of your home’s construction, you can also look at historic Sanborn Maps. These maps were drawn by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, and they show the footprints of whatever buildings were on each lot at the time the map was made (see Section on ‘How to Research the History of A Building’ for more detail on using Sanborn maps.)

If your home was built before 1934, you may very well find the footprint of it (and whatever outbuildings that were once there) on the Sanborn maps. An example of a Sanborn map (the 1907 and 1924 Sanborn maps for the 1300 block of Andrews Street) can be found in the ‘How to Research the History of Your Building’ section above.

If you are trying to find out information about a lot which is empty now, first look at deed records to determine when structures *would* have been built on the property, and then look at the Sanborn Maps, as described above. Some things that would have left significant archaeological footprints would be cisterns and privies – both of which are frequently noted on the Sanborn

maps (marked as “WC”), but do not exist today. Or, sometimes trash heaps existed in the past, but no surface remains today – these too can be archaeologically rich (although these would not have been drawn on the maps).

If a property has been subjected to modern construction methods, such as backhoe stripping, deep trenching for modern utility lines, and the like, there are likely to be few intact archaeological remains. That is, you would find artifacts, but these artifacts would not be in the locations where they had been originally deposited, and so would reveal very little, archaeologically (archaeologists rely a great deal on knowing *where* artifacts were found in the ground). However, if you find that the property has been more or less undisturbed through the years, there could be very interesting and useful archaeology under the ground surface.

If your search determines that this is true for your lot, archaeologists would argue that the first and best choice is that the remains should be preserved. However, people’s needs change, and you may decide to build something new. If you do want to do construction that would disturb the intact archaeological remains on your lot, you could choose to have them investigated by a properly trained archaeologist. There are archaeologists and historians in the Houston area who are willing to discount their rates for houses in historic areas, or to refer you to someone who will.

Some sources of archaeologist and historian referrals are:

- The Houston Archaeological Society
  - <http://www.houstonarcheology.org/>
- The Texas Historical Commission
  - <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/stewards/stwdefault.shtml>
- Local universities which teach archaeology
  - University of Houston, Department of Anthropology, 713/743-3780
  - Rice University, Department of Anthropology, 713/348-3380, [anth@rice.edu](mailto:anth@rice.edu)
  - Houston Community College, Department of Anthropology, 713/718-5625
- The City of Houston Historic Preservation Office, Randy Pace, 713/837-7796
- The Houston History Association (the nonprofit which is producing this handbook)
  - <http://www.houstonhistoryassociation.org>
- The Community Archaeology Research Institute, Inc. (a nonprofit which provides archaeology services)
  - <http://www.publicarchaeology.org/CARI>

Finally, a word of assurance: If you are a private landowner and are not using your lot to build a project which is funded or insured by a governmental agency, you are usually not *required* to do any archaeology on your property. This is true even if your property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or if it is in a National-Register listed neighborhood. If your property has *already* been designated as a State Archaeological Landmark, you would need to have a state permit to dig anything in your yard, but in most residential situations this is not an issue. For clarification on your particular property, you can contact the City of Houston’s Historic Preservation Office in the Planning & Development Department.

There is a TV cable show about old houses, called “If Walls Could Talk”...well, the ground can talk too! So even if archaeology is not required on your historic lot, we hope that you will consider it if you want to do additional construction. A lot can be learned from a lot!

## CITY OF HOUSTON HISTORIC LANDMARK AND HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATIONS

The City of Houston offers the opportunity for individual historic buildings and historic neighborhoods to be designated as official City of Houston Historic Landmarks or Historic Districts.

### Why Designate?

Official designation by the city honors a property by recognizing the significance of the structure or neighborhood to the city's history. Owners of designated historic buildings, or of historic structures in a historic district, may qualify for a local tax exemption as well as for other benefits, such as reduced permit fees. Also, designation confers some protection from inappropriate alterations or demolition of historic structures, although this is not absolute except in the case of 'protected' historic properties. Properties that are designated as historic landmarks may also purchase a plaque to place on the structure indicating that it is a landmark.

### Designation Criteria

To qualify, the landmark or district must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation
2. be the location of a significant local, state or national event
3. be identified with a person or event that contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation
4. exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city
5. be one of the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood
6. be identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state or nation
7. specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present
8. value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.

Generally, the building must be at least 50 years old, or in the case of a district, the majority of the buildings in the area must be at least 50 years old, unless the building or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age. For example, the Astrodome is less than 50 years old, but has extraordinary significance on both the local and national level.

Some landmarks may be eligible for additional designation as a 'Protected Landmark'. To be designated as Protected, a building must meet either three of the criteria listed above for landmark designation; be constructed before 1905; be listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or be recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark. Protected Landmark status means that any changes to the exterior of the building must be approved by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission, but special tax benefits may be available to owners of Protected Landmarks.

## **How To Apply**

Applications for landmark or historic district designation may be initiated by the property owner (in the case of the district, by an individual property owner with support of at least 51% of the owners in the proposed district) or by the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC). Only a property owner may apply for Protected Landmark designation.

Anyone interested in a landmark or historic district designation should contact the City Historic Preservation office to discuss the designation and to obtain an application. In addition to the application, the applicant should submit a description of the property, any known historic information, and photographs. An application for 'protected' landmark may be made in conjunction with an application for landmark designation, or at any time after the city council has designated the property as a landmark.

Application for designation of an historic district can be initiated by any owner of property within the proposed district, but will need the signed support of at least 51% of the property owners in the district. The best course of action is to contact the City's Historic Preservation office prior to starting your petition drive in order to receive a full explanation of the requirements as well as to get feedback on appropriate district boundaries, appropriate forms, and petitioning tips.

## **Steps to Approval**

After the application has been filed with the City's Historic Preservation office, the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission (HAHC) will conduct a public hearing on the application. If the HAHC recommends city designation of the district, the Planning Commission will then hold a public hearing and make a recommendation as well. The application then goes before City Council for the official decision on whether to designate the property or district. . The entire process takes several months from the time the application is submitted until the City Council hearing.

## HISTORICAL MARKERS

### Texas Historical Marker Programs in Harris County

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) and Harris County Historical Commission (HCHC) encourage citizens to become involved in recognizing historic people, places, and events through placement of official Texas Historical Markers. Any individual or group may apply for a marker for a qualifying topic. While there is no guarantee that a marker will be approved, an accurate, well-documented application has an excellent chance of approval.

There are three similar marker programs: **Subjects** (such as businesses, communities, events, individuals, organizations, schools, professions, religious congregations, social movements, and sports), **Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks** (structures, such as bridges, buildings, and manufacturing facilities), and **Cemeteries**. The three marker types have somewhat different eligibility criteria and application requirements.

In general, a Subject, Landmark, or Cemetery must be at least 50 years old to qualify, but age alone is not enough. It must also have historic significance, that is, some “influence, effect, or impact on the course of history or cultural development” in the local community or beyond. Two exceptions to the 50-year rule are that historic events may be marked after 30 years, and individuals may be marked after they have been deceased for 10 years.

All marker applications require a completed application form and a narrative history with documentation, both submitted as e-mail attachments. The Narrative (typically 5 to 10 pages) is the most important part of the package, and the one that will take the most work to prepare. Landmarks and Cemeteries also require photos, site plans, and maps.

Prospective marker applicants should contact Harris County Historical Commission before starting work on a marker application, to obtain a packet containing a data sheet and narrative guidelines. Completion of the data sheet will help both the applicant and HCHC to understand the scope of the topic and the requirements of the application process, such as ensuring financing and consent of the property owner where the marker will be placed.

Upon request, an HCHC member familiar with the general topic may be asked to serve as a mentor. The job of the mentor is not to prepare the application or the narrative, but to assist the applicant with understanding the THC rules and to suggest research ideas and sources, so that the resulting narrative and other attachments will meet all THC criteria.

THC has prepared **Marker Research Guides** for several broad classes of marker types – Cemeteries, Houses and Buildings, Churches and Synagogues, Communities, Organizations and Institutions, Individuals, Events, and Texas in World War II. These guides are available on the THC website (see web address below) and are very useful to novice and experienced researchers alike. The example narrative at the end of each Guide is of particular value in illustrating the level of detail expected.

Also available in the **Marker Toolbox** section of the THC website are “How To” guides for several classes of historical resources, including census records, Confederate pension records, newspapers, oral history, photographic collections, Sanborn maps, and the Topozone.com website.

Applicants must pay all expenses associated with the marker process – including the research, application fees, fabrication cost of the marker, its installation, and the dedication ceremony. Depending on marker size, the total cost for the whole process is typically from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

All applications for markers to be placed in Harris County must be approved by HCHC before being filed with THC. The HCHC application deadline for markers is September 1 (to be delivered late in the following year). Since THC will only accept marker applications from November 1 to January 15, the entire process from start of research to marker dedication, often takes the better part of two years, especially for cemeteries, which must first be “designated” as a Historic Texas Cemetery before the marker application may be filed.

Applications meeting the basic criteria, with an informative, well-written narrative that is clearly supported by good reference notes and all necessary attachments, follow the most expeditious path. Prompt responses by applicants to THC requests for fees, clarifications, and marker text approval will also expedite the process.

Applications for Historic Texas Cemetery (HTC) designation are simpler than marker applications, and may be filed at any time of year. However, Cemeteries also wishing to receive a marker must submit the HTC application to HCHC by May 1 to receive a marker in the following year.

### **Harris County Historical Commission**

Sponsored by the County Judge, the Harris County Historical Commission (HCHC) is composed of 50 local historians who are appointed by Harris County Commissioners Court for 2-year terms. All are volunteers, dedicated to preserving and documenting Harris County history. The HCHC works in partnership with THC to preserve Texas’ heritage for the use, education, enjoyment, and economic benefit of present and future generations. HCHC has an active historical marker program and reviews all local applications for state historical markers before they go to THC.

There are presently over 300 state historical markers in Harris County and dozens more are in progress. If you know of a subject that is deserving of a state historical marker, please contact the HCHC Chairman or Marker Chair and briefly describe your marker subject. Volunteer mentors are available to guide you in preparing and submitting your marker application.

Patrick S. Van Pelt, Chairman The Benjamin Building 1218 Webster Street Houston, Texas 77002-8841 (713) 289-6252 <a href="mailto:chairman@harrischc.org">chairman@harrischc.org</a>	<a href="mailto:markermentor@harrischc.org">Debra Blacklock-Sloan</a> Marker Mentor Chair 713) 491-0971 <a href="mailto:markermentor@harrischc.org">markermentor@harrischc.org</a> Bernice Mistrot Marker Review Committee Chairman <a href="mailto:bmist@juno.com">bmist@juno.com</a> Trevia Wooster Beverly Cemetery Committee Chairman (713) 864-6862 <a href="mailto:cemeterychair@harrischc.org">cemeterychair@harrischc.org</a>
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Links for more information:

Harris County Historical Commission, <http://www.harrischc.org>

Texas Historical Commission, <http://www.thc.state.tx.us>

## TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

### **What are the designations offered by the Texas Historical Commission?**

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) offers four types of designations to recognize and protect historic and prehistoric properties:

- National Register of Historic Places - The National Register of Historic Places is a federal program administered in our state by the THC in coordination with the National Park Service. Listing in the National Register provides national recognition of a property's historical or architectural significance and denotes that it is worthy of preservation. Buildings, sites, objects, structures and districts are eligible for this designation if they are at least 50 years old and meet established criteria. Plaques are available, but not required, for this designation.
- Recorded Texas Historic Landmark - Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHLs) are properties judged to be historically and architecturally significant. The THC awards RTHL designation to buildings and structures at least 50 years old that are judged worthy of preservation for their architectural and historical associations. RTHL is a legal designation and comes with a measure of protection; it is the highest honor the state can bestow on a historic structure. Purchase and display of an official Texas historical marker is a required component of the RTHL designation process. To nominate a property, the owner's consent is required. Contact the THC for a full explanation of the designation and its legal requirements.
- State Archeological Landmark - State Archeological Landmarks are designated by the THC and receive legal protection under the Antiquities Code of Texas. Listing in the National Register is a prerequisite for State Archeological Landmark designation of a building.
- Historic Texas Cemetery - Historic Texas Cemetery designations are issued by the THC. Cemeteries or burial sites that are at least 50 years old and worthy of preservation for their historical associations can receive this designation. A special medallion and marker are available, but not required, for this designation.

### **What regulations apply to historical designations?**

- National Register designation imposes no restrictions on property owners. Those receiving grant assistance or federal tax credits for rehabilitation projects, however, must adhere to certain standards. With a National Register designation, the property receives extra consideration before any federal projects, such as highway construction, are undertaken. To nominate a property, the owner's consent is required.
- Recorded Texas Historic Landmark designation helps preserve the state's historically and architecturally significant resources. Owners of RTHL-designated structures must give the THC 60 days notice before any alterations are made to the exterior of the structure. Unsympathetic changes to these properties may result in removal of the designation and historical marker.

- State Archeological Landmark designation stipulates the property cannot be removed, altered, damaged, salvaged or excavated without a permit from the THC. This designation encourages preservation and ensures that resources that cannot be preserved are at least properly documented. The designation of State Archeological Landmarks on private land is recorded in the county deed records and is conveyed with the property when sold. To nominate a site or building on private property, the owner's consent is required.
- Historic Texas Cemetery designation is an official recognition of family and community graveyards and encourages preservation of historic cemeteries. The designation imposes no restrictions on private owners' use of the land adjacent to the cemetery but provides for the recording of the cemetery into the county deed records as a historically dedicated property worthy of preservation. To nominate a cemetery, the owner, who is considered a trustee of the land dedicated for cemetery purposes, will be notified, although the owner's consent is not required.

## THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The National Register of Historic Places is our nation's official list of properties significant in American history, architecture and archeology. Historic places listed in the Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects. Listing in the National Register honors the property by recognizing its importance to the local community, state, or nation, and denotes that it is worthy of preservation.

The National Register of Historic Places is a federal program administered in the state of Texas by the Texas Historical Commission in coordination with the National Park Service. [Buildings, sites, objects, structures, and districts](#) are eligible for this designation if they are at least 50 years old and meet established criteria.

The National Register designation imposes no restrictions on property owners. Those receiving grant assistance or federal tax credits for rehabilitation projects, however, must adhere to certain standards. With a National Register designation, the property receives extra consideration before any federal projects, such as highway construction, are undertaken. To nominate a property, the owner's consent is required.

### **Benefits of listing a property in the National Register**

Owners of properties listed in the National Register may:

- Receive a certificate of listing from the Texas Historical Commission
- Purchase an official National Register plaque through the Texas Historical Commission
- Receive technical assistance from Texas Historical Commission staff about maintenance and restoration issues
- Be eligible for financial incentives such as grants and tax abatements –
  - Owners of properties listed in the National Register may be eligible for a 20% investment tax credit for the certified rehabilitation of income-producing certified historic structures such as commercial, industrial, or rental residential buildings.
  - Qualification for federal grants for historic preservation, when funds are available.
- Receive special consideration in planning for federal or federally assisted projects – Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires that Federal agencies allow the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation ([www.achp.gov](http://www.achp.gov)) an opportunity to comment on all projects affecting historic properties either listed in, or determined eligible for listing in, the National Register. The Advisory Council oversees and ensures the consideration of historic properties in the Federal Planning process.

Owners of properties listed in the National Register are not:

- Subject to restrictions of any kind
- Obligated to open their properties to the public, to restore them, or even to maintain them, if they choose not to do so.

## **Criteria for listing in the National Register**

Eligible properties must be at least 50 years old (unless exceptionally important), maintain their historic integrity and meet at least one of the following four criteria at the local, state, or national levels of significance:

1. The property is associated with significant historical trends or events.
2. The property is associated with the lives of significant persons.
3. The property represents distinctive design or construction.
4. The property has potential to reveal important archeological data.

Certain properties are not ordinarily considered for listing in the National Register. These include cemeteries, birthplaces or graves of historical figures, buildings or structures moved from their original locations, reconstructed buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, buildings or structures that have had unsympathetic or inappropriate modifications and properties that may have achieved significance within the last 50 years. Such properties may qualify, however, in certain circumstances.

If you are interested in nominating a property for National Register listing, please contact the Texas Historical Commission for the latest application requirements. <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/>

## **How is a property listed in the National Register of Historic Places?**

In Texas, historic places are nominated to the National Register by the Texas Historical Commission. Nomination forms are usually prepared by property owners, although anyone can prepare a nomination to the National Register, including local governments and historical societies. The Texas Historic Commission considers each property proposed for listing and makes a recommendation on its eligibility to the National Register.

During the time the proposed nomination is being reviewed by the Texas Historical Commission, property owners and local officials are notified of the intent to nominate and public comment is solicited. Owners of private property are given an opportunity to concur in or object to the nomination. If the owner of a private property, or the majority of private property owners for a property or district with multiple owners, objects to the nomination, the historic property cannot be listed in the National Register. In that case, the THC may forward the nomination to the National Park Service only for a determination of eligibility. If the historic property is listed or determined eligible for listing, then the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation must be afforded the opportunity to comment on any federal or federally funded project that may affect it.

The THC forwards nominations to the National Park Service to be considered for registration if a majority of private property owners has not objected to listing. During the National Register's evaluation of nomination documentation, another opportunity for public comment is provided by the publication of pending nominations in the Federal Register.

## **How Long Does the Nomination Process Take?**

The process varies from state to state, depending on state workload, planning, and registration priorities, and the schedule of the review board. The process takes a minimum of 90 days to fulfill all of the review and notification requirements, provided that a complete and fully

documented nomination form has been completed for the property. Upon submission to the National Park Service, a decision on whether to list the property is made within 45 days.

## GENEALOGY

Genealogy and Public History are fundamentally linked by the types of sources that are used to gather information. Both are connected to the past and the lives of the people of that past. In fact, in some cases, in-depth genealogy can lead to the examination of a whole neighborhood in an attempt to determine who is related to whom.

As with any kind of research, a genealogical inquiry begins with what you already know. Note down what you know by using a Five-generation (Pedigree) Chart and family group sheets – in pencil, because these are unverified facts. Theoretically, there should be a family group sheet for every *even* number on your five-generation chart. (Both of these charts may be found on the “for beginners” page at <http://www.hpl.lib.tx.us/clayton/>)

Call other family members for help and see if someone else has already begun researching so you do not have to start from the beginning.

Documents will not only be used to fill in any blanks on your charts, but to verify every fact that is there: names, dates, places, and relationships. You want to use evidence from a variety of sources, not just unverified published genealogies.

Genealogical/historical evidence is divided into two categories:

Primary evidence which is created at or near to the time of the actual event (i.e. a birth certificate, marriage record)

Secondary evidence is second-hand and often based on hearsay. Any information that has been transcribed, translated or abstracted is secondary evidence and must be confirmed.

The same document can contain both primary and secondary evidence. (the birth date given on a death certificate is secondary evidence. The death date, however, is primary evidence.)

This is due to the nature of information itself. Bear in mind that, “...every age was an age of information, each in its own way, and that information has always been unstable.” (1)

This leads us to the internet, which is where most researchers now begin. There are a growing number of sites that are available to assist those doing genealogical research. The staff of Houston’s Clayton Library, Center for Genealogical Research, has compiled a list of useful sites to use from home: <http://www.hpl.lib.tx.us/clayton/internet.html>

There is a second list that consists largely of databases that are paid for by the library. Houston Public Library card holders may access the majority of them from home by using their card: [http://www.hpl.lib.tx.us/research/category/GEN\\_page.html](http://www.hpl.lib.tx.us/research/category/GEN_page.html)

When you take information from someone else’s research remember that all records created before 1900 were handwritten. Researchers often depend on the fact that an item was listed in an index, without consulting the original record to verify the facts. In other instances, the original is misread due to inexperience with older handwriting.

When you have exhausted what you can find on the internet, you are going to need to begin visiting libraries, archives, historical societies and courthouses.

Houston is fortunate to have one of the best genealogical libraries in the country. The Clayton Library, Center for Genealogical Research is located in the Museum District, at 5300 Caroline: <http://www.hpl.lib.tx.us/clayton/index.html>

The materials at Clayton Library are arranged, as much as possible, in a way that makes it very easy on the researcher. Stop at the front desk and let the staff member explain the lay out of the library to you. From there they will send you to the reference desk. The staff member there will ask if you have a 5-generation chart. So be sure to *bring your charts and notes with you*. The staff at Clayton Library are very knowledgeable but they need to have something to go on. It is not a good use of your time or theirs to ask them to try and memorize your family history when a chart in hand clearly shows what facts you are missing.

Another way to maximize your research time is to resist the temptation to tell stories about your family that have no bearing on the immediate research question. It is hard on genealogists, we know, but try not to respond to the greeting of, "How may I help you?" with, "Yes. When my great-great-great grandfather, Jeremiah, was a young boy of 12 he, and his mother (who was 28 at the time-she had him when she was 16), and 3 brothers (Jake, Jacob, Jack) and 2 sisters (Jane and Janet), they all had names that started with "J", see, came to America..." It is no judgment upon the worthiness of your family, but they are not interested.

Lay out that chart and let them get a look at where your blanks are and you can immediately get to researching!

1. New York Review of Books v.55 no.10 June, 12, 2008 "The Library in the New Age" by Robert Darnton.

## CEMETERIES – PRESERVATION, DOCUMENTATION & MAINTENANCE

There are over 250 cemeteries in Harris County. They range in size from megaplexes like Forest Park-Lawndale, which covers almost 400 acres and contains more than 100,000 graves, to Eichwurzel Family Cemetery, which is the size of a typical urban lot with 14 burials. Most are well maintained but others have fallen into disrepair through neglect. Regardless of the condition, our burying grounds are unique archeological and historical resources of sacred, artistic, and genealogical significance and should be given great respect.

If you are interested in saving a cemetery in your neighborhood, this guide will give you the bare bones basics of Cemetery Preservation 101. Below is a list of the major factors you will need to understand in order to successfully complete your project.

Develop a Plan – This is the first step. Find out who owns the cemetery. Use the libraries, historical societies, and the internet to gather information about the property. Enlist the help of interested volunteers. Know what you want to accomplish before starting any work on the cemetery.

Document the Existing Property – Draw a map showing locations of graves, fences, walkways, other monuments, signage, landscaping features, terrain, design, previous restoration efforts, etc. Then document what is there with extensive photography (making certain to carefully label each piece of evidence). Record any depression in the earth that could be the location of unmarked burial. Indicate the locations of trees, rocks, and other natural features.

Cover the Legal Bases – There are stringent laws that deal with cemeteries even if they have been abandoned. Meet with an attorney who is knowledgeable about these issues. There are often city, county and state laws that oversee the administration of cemeteries. Be sure you are on firm ground here before proceeding with any restoration or maintenance.

Commence Restoration – Proceed with caution. Most of all DO NO HARM. Clean up operations are important and need to be done in an organized manner. Be careful. Neglected burial grounds are dangerous places. Watch for snakes, harmful debris, syringes, broken glass, holes on the ground, heavy gravestones that may topple unexpectedly and any other thing you can think of that might earn you a trip to the emergency room. Remove waste carefully. Do not remove or damage any cemetery site features no matter how damaged you might feel they are. Learn the proper way to reset fallen markers. If stones are badly damaged, consider hiring a conservator to repair them. Study the proper methods of cleaning old grave markers. Don't forget signage. Have a sign on the property that tells the name of the cemetery, hours of operation, warnings of potential hazards, rules about treatment of the property, information about persons interred, tell about the restoration effort, solicit volunteers and give contact information.

Maintenance – Place a rules and regulations sign in the cemetery. Consider lighting to lower vandalism and vagrancy. Provide benches and trash receptacles (that are regularly emptied). Keep up on the mowing. Trim carefully around the stones. Be careful with the use of commercial herbicides. Prune trees so to avoid storm damage. Just maintain a good maintenance schedule.

Raise Awareness of your Project – Stir up public interest. Let people know what you are doing. Contact the media (TV, print, etc.). Inform local politicians of your efforts. If you have a web site, tell about the project there. Offer tours to tell the history of the cemetery.

Raise Funds to Endow Your Effort – Solicit neighborhood donations. Stage fund raising events. Consider applying for grants. Ask for corporate donations. Mention bequests or any other way you can think of to raise money.

This is a bare bones outline. For additional information, you should contact:

- Texas Historical Commission – Preserving Historic Cemeteries Guidelines (see THC website: <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/cemeteries/cempreserve.shtml>)
- The Texas Room at the Julia Ideson Library
- Google or other search engines
- Historical Associations
- Workshops on the subject
- Get “Burial Ground Documentation” by Andi MacDonald at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com> as a guide for forms, photography, etc.

## NEIGHBORHOOD ORAL HISTORY

Interviewing a neighbor means you are documenting history and making a treasured record for your neighborhood, for history and for yourself. You will have to make decisions and you will have to do some work, but you will also be involved in something that is fun and exciting. Each oral history is unique because the people are unique and each person has her or his own history.

Your first decision is deciding why you should be involved in an oral history project as an interviewer. There are various reasons to be the interviewer but perhaps they can be summarized in three main reasons:

- You like or admire the person you will interview or are curious about the person's story.
- The person you will interview is important to you because of your connection to that person or because that person knows something you are interested in.
- There is no one else to create this historical interview. This person is unknown to you and you aren't sure what this person knows, but you think the topic is important to explore and no one else is available to actually do the interview.

You may find yourself mostly deciding to do an interview for the third reason. You may be interested in the neighborhood, and no one else is able to do the actual interview for the oral history part of the project. You may feel that this is out of your league and it may be if you answer 'no' to these two questions:

- Do you have any curiosity about anyone or anything in your neighborhood that has ever happened or is happening?  
OR
- Have you ever spoken to another person, NOT just in your neighborhood, but anyone, anytime, anywhere?

Congratulations! You answered yes to both questions. You have at least some curiosity about your neighborhood and you have spoken to another person. You are qualified to be the interviewer in the oral history project. And the good news is that this is the hardest decision you'll have to make.

The second decision involves deciding how much you need to know to interview a neighbor. Surprisingly, this is the easy part. Yes, you have to do some research (see Section on research). Even if someone else has done the basic research about the neighborhood, giving you dates, street names, and other basic background, you have to do some research on your own. This is good, because when you find out what information isn't available, you'll also know some of the questions that need to be asked in the interview. Remember this is a group project so you don't need to do all the research, other members of the committee can help you on this. At this point you need to determine what you know and what you would like to know.

The third decision is deciding who you will interview. You could go door to door asking neighbors if they'd like to tell you about themselves and the neighborhood. That is one way, but probably not the way you'll do it. The committee members working on the neighborhood project should be the first ones you interview. First, they already are interested in the project. Second, because they are interested, they have some knowledge about the neighborhood. Remember

people new to the neighborhood or the young adults on the committee have their unique new perspective on the neighborhood and should also be interviewed.

Interviewing these committee members first serves several purposes. It gives you a chance to practice interviewing and it gives you information you can use in other interviews. The committee members will also know other people who should be interviewed and they can make contact with those people. Also, committee members can give you feedback on how to conduct the interview once they have been interviewed. Their responsibility in giving feedback is to give useful, non-judgmental comments; your responsibility is to take the feedback not as criticism of you as a person or as an interviewer, but as ways to make the interview better and easier for you and the interviewee.

The next decision is deciding on the questions. You should have a list of questions that include requests for basic factual information and open-ended questions. You will probably work with other committee members in developing this list.

Among the basic factual information questions are ones such as:

1. *What is your name and how do you spell it?*
2. *How long have you lived in the neighborhood?*
3. *Who have been your neighbors through the years?*
4. *What school did your children attend?*

Before I move on to examples of open-ended questions, I must emphasize that the most important question you will ask and which you must ask before any other is #1. *What is your name and how do you spell it?* Without it, there may be some interest in hearing the rest of the interview or reading a transcript of it, but the value and authenticity of the interview is reduced to zero. As the interviewer, you will open the taping session with your name, the date, and the name of the person being interviewed. BUT the person should give his or her name as verification AND so he or she can give the correct pronunciation of the name on tape. You will have been visiting with the person before the interview starts so it may feel a bit awkward, but it is essential. Besides it gives the person an easy answer to start out with and it makes it clear that this is going to be about that person.

Among the open-ended questions you might ask are:

1. *Tell me what you like best about the neighborhood?*
2. *Who has moved away that you miss most and why?*
3. *How did you decorate the house for holidays?*
4. *What has changed the most in the neighborhood since you moved here?*
5. *What did you do during Tropical Storm Allison?*

These questions ask for more than facts. You should ask follow-up questions, especially if the person is heading off in different directions that don't relate to the neighborhood project or if they give short answers. One way people know that they are being listened to is by asking them a question based on what they just said. Ask them questions in response to some of the above questions such as:

- To #2. Who moved in after Mrs. Worth moved away?*
- To #3. Did the neighborhood ever have 4<sup>th</sup> of July parades?*
- To #5. What did you do after the water started coming in?*

Depending on decisions made by the committee, you may or may not want to ask personal or “How did you feel?” questions. A neighborhood history project is probably not the appropriate place to document how someone felt about the death of a spouse, but it may be the place to ask questions about what did neighbors do after the spouse died. This assumes of course either the person brought up the death in the first place or the committee decided this is a proper topic. Questions about politics, religion, ethnicity and other issues should be discussed with the committee before the interview.

It is important to remember the interview is about the interviewee’s story. But having said that, I think it is important to remember you are not an impersonal robot asking questions. You have specific things you are interested in and your own particular viewpoint on some events. Often your personal response to a comment by the interviewer will elicit more comments from him or her. For example, if you went to the same school and had the same teacher, you might comment that you remember when Mrs. Goodbody gave out gold stars for a good deed and how excited you were when you first got one. Just remember this is not your interview, you are not the star of the show.

Personally I prefer to give the interviewee a list of about 10 questions which will be asked in the interview. Some people prefer to not give the list and just tell the interviewee what the general topics of the interview will be. Either way it is important to give the person an opportunity to collect their thoughts before the interview. I think giving the questions before hand, makes the person feel more at ease because they know what will be asked and know that everyone is being asked those questions. The follow-up questions are ones the interviewer will have in mind or will develop in the course of the interview.

I’ve skipped decisions about equipment, scheduling, release forms and transcriptions because those are covered in great detail in many oral history How-To manuals and online sources. My brief comments on those subjects are:

Equipment – Use the best equipment you can and practice, practice, practice and practice some more using the equipment before you actually interview anyone for the project. Practice with family members, friends or a pet. Part of what you are practicing is using the equipment as well as hearing yourself ask questions.

Scheduling – You will most likely be interviewing the person in their home. You will schedule for the interviewee’s convenience, but don’t forget about yours. Unless you are a professional, in which case you wouldn’t be reading this, you really do need at least two hours between interviews when they are in homes, even if the people live next door to one another. Not only do you need set up and take down time, you need to decompress from an intense activity. Let me caution you that you will be amazed at how quickly the time goes if the interviewee is comfortable and talkative, but you may have to work to put the interviewee at ease by asking lots of follow-up questions or you may have had to work hard to keep the interviewee on topic. You most likely won’t know until you’ve started the interview which is the case. I don’t say this to scare you away from being an interviewer. I’m just saying again each interview will be unique and you need to be aware of all that means.

Release forms – This is probably the second most important thing you need to remember to do. Do you remember what the first is? (See basic questions.) Without the permission of the interviewee for others to use the interview, the interview will be caught in copyright limbo for 90 years or more. Not only legally will others not be able to use it, simple rights of privacy would

be difficult for most of us to disregard. Don't forget you as the interviewer have copyright to the interview, so sign the release form.

Transcriptions – Most oral history interviews have been transcribed for ease of use. The interview can be read much more quickly than listened to or watched. The tapes may or may not be fragile and there may or may not be equipment to play them back on. This means that someone is going to have to listen at least once to the analog or digital recording. Basically this goes back to equipment – know how to use the equipment and make sure the microphones are set up to get good sound quality.

I hope this hasn't overwhelmed you or, worse, made you less interested in being an interviewer. A couple of thoughts that might make you less apprehensive are these:

Even if you've never done this before or have never been interviewed before, you've seen Oprah Winfrey or Tom Brokaw interview ordinary people and public figures. You have an idea of what happens in an interview. You also know that in a successful interview, Oprah and Tom, even though it is their show, put the focus on the Joe, Jane, Jim or Jill they are interviewing. Be interested in the person you're interviewing.

This won't be the last thing you read about doing oral histories. I'm too lazy to re-invent the wheel and I'm not smart enough to have written published books or articles about doing oral histories. Read those books and practice.

I have been involved in oral history projects as an interviewer because it is fun. You do have to do some work to prepare for any interview, but it is fun when you finally do the interview. I am always a little anxious before the interview, I'm not a professional and I'm not a particularly great conversationalist. But for some reason interviews are fun. If after 10 interviews you are having a terrible experience, this probably isn't fun for you. But don't be surprised if you do enjoy being an interviewer.

Finally, because you are interviewing your neighbors, you are contributing to making your neighborhood stronger. The person you interview will now know you and you will now know another neighbor. AND you will be introducing that person to other neighbors when they read, listen or watch the interview. Although this oral history is part of neighborhood history project, by helping neighbors know one another, you are making your neighborhood a better place to live.

### **Tips for Oral History Interviews**

- Inform the interviewee in advance of the condition and subject of the interview.
- Test and experiment with your equipment before going to the interview.
- Remember that cassette tapes have a few seconds of lead time and do not begin to record the moment you turn on the machine.
- Use good quality, sixty-minute tapes. Longer tapes are more likely to break and shorter ones do not provide enough time on each side.
- Do not store tapes in a hot, cold, humid, or dusty place.
- Record the date, place, and names of the participants at the beginning of the interview.
- Do not record near air conditioners in the summer or heating vents in the winter. Check electrical circuits for possible interference.
- Remember that a good interview is more a monologue than a dialogue.

- If your recorder does not ‘click off’ automatically at the end of one side of the cassette, remember to watch the time and to change the tape.
- During the interview, do not fiddle with the tape recorder without a good reason.
- Punch out the tabs on the cassette immediately after you finish with it, but not before, to prevent accidental erasure of the tape.
- If you are using an outside microphone, keep it on a small stand. Do not handle the microphone while recording, and do not pass it back and forth.
- Never use a tape for interviews with more than one person.
- Never use the same tape for more than one session of an interview with the same person.
- Remember that an interview is not complete until you have obtained a valid certificate of gift or ‘release’ form granting research access to the tape.
- An interview is also not complete until a concise summary of the interview has been made. In some place, summarize the contents of the interview in a concise paragraph. Mention your name, the interviewee’s name, the date of the interview, and events, times, people, and places discussed. Be specific.
- Label your tapes. Write the interviewee’s name and the date on each side of the tape. If one side of the cassette is blank, write ‘blank’ on that side.
- If the interviewee has personal manuscripts or institutional records of historical significance, encourage him or her to donate them to a proper repository.

## **INVOLVING YOUTH IN THE PROJECT**

Invite the youth of the neighborhood to participate in researching and preparing the history. As youth learn about Houston's rich history and the role of their own neighborhood in the making of that history, they will come to understand the importance of preserving and protecting the built environment in which they live. In addition, the neighborhood's senior residents are wonderful role models for present and future residents of the neighborhood.

### **Recruiting Youth for the Project**

- Most neighborhoods include a public school and perhaps a private school. Contact the principal or headmaster to identify an interested teacher or a school history club.
- A local PTA, PTO, or other parent organization connected with the school may have parents who would like to help or be willing to supervise the students' efforts.
- Contact the local Boy and Girl Scout organizations to locate troops in your neighborhood and collect contact information.
- Church, parish, or synagogue youth groups are also a good source of volunteers. Today many religious institutions are actively preserving their own histories in local archives. These histories are also part of the neighborhood history.

### **Collaborating with Youth Organizations and Schools**

- Work with local educational professionals to design a project for the neighborhood history that would also satisfy the requirements of a class assignment.
- Design a project for Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts that would meet the requirements of an earned Badge.
- Encourage youth in a church, parish, or synagogue to research and prepare a history of that religious institution. If that has already been done, youth might work with the institution's archives.

### **Suggested Roles for Youth in a Neighborhood History Project**

- Key to successful engagement of youth in a Neighborhood History Project is not only selecting activities that are age appropriate, but also including the youth in the planning of their role(s). If youth can determine their own interests and skills, they will be more committed to the project and take pride in the outcome.
- Many schools are named after a leader in that community. Students may research and prepare a biography of the namesake and/or a history of the school.
- Many youth organizations in the neighborhood have been in existence for some time. Youth may wish to investigate the history of the scouting program, one of the organized sports activities, or other programs that have engaged the youth in that community.
- Younger children may learn valuable life lessons by interviewing residents who have lived in the neighborhood for some time.
- A long-time resident might be persuaded to be a guest speaker for a school class or for one of the youth organizations.
- Older youth (teenagers) may be trained to assist with taking oral histories.
- If the neighborhood has a suitable location, talented youth may design and paint a mural depicting various aspects of the neighborhood's history.

- Older youth have excellent computer skills. Some of them might enjoy creating a web site for the project.
- Develop a neighborhood history scavenger hunt for children. The younger youth would be very helpful with this project. A GPS could be used to locate historic landmarks or buildings in the neighborhood.
- Ask the youth for suggestions. They usually have very creative ideas.

## **Conclusion**

We often hear the phrase that our youth are the future of our nation. That is also true of your neighborhood. Thus, whatever final products comprise the outcome of a neighborhood history project, part of that outcome should be designed to educate the neighborhood youth. If those youth contribute significantly to that product, they will take pride in and assume responsibility for the continued preservation of their own neighborhood.

## ARCHIVING AND PRESERVING DOCUMENTS, PHOTOS, AND HISTORIC ARTIFACTS

The four major enemies of archival materials are heat, high humidity, unfiltered light, and high acidity. Below is a bit of detail (about ideal conditions) regarding each issue. It is recognized that not everyone will be able to achieve these ideal standards but one should strive to always move in this direction.

- All materials should be kept no warmer than 65 degrees Fahrenheit. If one is forced to store archival materials in un-air conditioned space such as a garage, attic or basement then it would be better to donate them to a person or institution that could do better. If, however, one can store material in a closet or chest in a climate controlled space then, even though not ideal, this is perfectly acceptable.
- All materials should be kept at or below 60% relative humidity. Basement space is always inadvisable as they are usually damp and prone to flood.
- When not being used, materials should be kept in an atmosphere that is as dark as possible. Many items, especially photographic material and schematics, left in bright light, will fade permanently in a matter of hours. Sunlight is the most damaging because of extreme brightness and heat. Think cold, dry and dark.
- All materials should ideally be stored in acid-free boxes and folders. Nineteenth Century + newspapers and other periodicals will be printed on very acidic wood pulp paper and should be surrounded with acid free materials. The acidity will then leech into the acid free covering and the item won't self-destruct so quickly. Neutral or buffered covering needs then to be changed periodically. Newspaper clippings need to be photocopied onto acid free paper and whole issues, ideally, should be microfilmed and/or scanned. Paper made before the industrial revolution, even though hundreds of years old, is often white and strong and supple. This older paper is acid free because paper at that time was made from cotton or linen rags rather than wood pulp.

One should avoid touching photographs with bare hands. Oil from the skin easily adheres to the emulsion on the surface of photographs and can result in degradation or other damage. Remember that, except for style examples, unidentified photographs are essentially worthless after a very few years.

If periodic copies are required of original material (for patrons or otherwise), then it is advisable to make a master photocopy or digital image from which additional reproductions may be supplied.

Recorded sound or images must be migrated in a timely manner. Film and tape media, as well as the equipment to access it, become obsolete very rapidly. Therefore formats such as audio cassettes, vinyl records, eight-track audio tapes, 16 mm film, VCRs and even CDs and DVDs, to name a few items, must be changed to the next new media on a regular basis. Digitization isn't the final answer, however, because, as we all know, electronics change faster than we can keep track. To digitize and store all information on some sort of dedicated server is a good stop gap. It also should allow mass migration. Information stored on a server requires what is called a digital asset management system DAMS which requires professional expertise to install and manage.

When moving archival materials, try to keep them flat and well-supported, say with the palm of the other hand. A very large flat object should be gently held where opposite sides are pulled together. The mid section will be slightly curved, but the item should never be folded with a crease. Items too large for legal size folders should be stored in over-size folders made with acid free stock and in flat filing cabinets (map cases) if they are available. Otherwise these large items should be well-folded and stacked horizontally on a sturdy flat surface. When perusing old or delicate books or other publications, a cradle should be used.

Always be gentle when handling anything that needs to last. There are two words to remember: “preservation” and “conservation”. In the world of archives they mean two different things. To “preserve” is to use practices such as those above to keep the materials in as good condition as possible. To “conserve” is to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars to have very technical and precise procedures performed by experts in order to restore certain archival items.

And finally, never use ink around archival materials – only pencil.

## APPENDIX-SOURCES LISTED BY LOCATION

### HARRIS COUNTY

Harris County has three locations for historic records: Harris County Clerk; Harris County District Clerk, and the Harris County Archives.

#### Harris County Clerk

This archive contains the most helpful records for historic buildings research: real property records, marriage records, deeds, mortgages, building contracts, commissioners court minutes, maps, probate records, and election results.

##### *Harris County Clerk Archives*

102 San Jacinto Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

Houston, TX 77002

Phone: 713-755-5170

#### Harris County District Clerk

Civil and criminal district court proceedings, divorce papers, naturalization records, and child support records from the 1830s. The Historical Document Room contains historical records from 1837-1925. Some of the most badly deteriorated records have been restored and preserved by the District Clerk's Office, and many records are now available for viewing online at:

[www.hcdistrictclerk.com/Common/HistoricalDocument/HistoricalDocuments.aspx](http://www.hcdistrictclerk.com/Common/HistoricalDocument/HistoricalDocuments.aspx)

##### *Harris County District Clerk*

Civil Courthouse, 201 Caroline, Suite 420

Houston, TX 77002

Phone: 713-755-5734

##### *Historical Documents*

Civil Courthouse, 201 Caroline, Room 200

Houston, TX 77002

Phone: 713-755-9463

##### *Records Center*

1301 Franklin 1st Floor

Houston, TX 77002

#### Harris County Archives

This archive contains records documenting the Tax Collector, Auditor's Office, Medical Examiner's Office, Treasurer, Harris County Social Services, and other Harris County government functions. It is best for researchers to call before going to the archives. For many queries, the archivists are willing to look up the information for the researcher, thus saving a trip

to the archives, especially when the information may not be located in the Harris County Archives. The archives operate differently than a library so it is recommended that you thoroughly review the website, then contact the archivist prior to visiting to further discuss the records that interest you. A partial list of records available at the archives is maintained on the Harris County Records Management website:

<http://www.hctx.net/RecordsManagement/Archives/Research.aspx>.

The most pertinent records to historic building research are:

- Block Books (includes Block Book Maps), 1915-present. Also available in Microfilm format.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1925-1939: Corrections stop in 1939.
- Building and Land Assessment/Valuation Cards, 1930-1980: Indicates value of land and improvement. The information on the cards supplement the information found in the Block Books. The information includes a footprint of the house, square footage, and building composition. In the sixties and seventies the county started photodocumenting the homes with Poloroids.
- Assessor's Abstracts, 1895-1914: Three columns – date; lot number; and owner name. The Assessor's Abstracts follows property ownership through the years. You can use the HCAD account number to locate tax records in the Assessor's Abstracts.
- Tax Rolls and Inventories, 1858 – 1983: includes real and personal property, minerals, banks, railroads, mobile homes. Indicates acres; value; location; lot; number of slaves and livestock.
- Poll Tax and Voter Registration lists, 1931-1998: Organized by precinct (neighborhood) then by last name. Lists addresses; length of time in Texas, County and precinct; occupation; and place of birth. Excellent resource for mapping neighborhoods.
- Abstracts of Title: Harris County also maintains Abstracts of Title in its archives. An abstract of title, often prepared by a title company, traces the conveyances and encumbrances on a piece of property from the original grant forward. It also contains a certification by the abstractor that the history is complete and accurate. Harris County's collection of Abstracts of Title is far from complete so call or visit their website to see if they have the one you need.
- Other records: Harris County Social Services records, Administrative records, WPA Applications, Client Case Files, Burial Records, and Harris County Cemetery logs. These records, which date back to the 1920s, provide information on family composition, children, jobs, etc. Charles Brace Collection (early developer in Houston); Subdivision maps; warranty deeds; kit house catalogues, Crain Ready-Cut House Company catalogues.

The archive also has a manuscript and oral history collection, as well as historical maps of the city.

*Harris County Archives*  
Criminal Justice Center  
1201 Franklin, 12th Floor  
Houston, Texas 77002

Phone: 713-368-7640  
Email: [archives@hctx.net](mailto:archives@hctx.net)

## HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

### Central Branch

500 McKinney  
Houston, TX 77002  
(713) 393-1313

- Newspapers on Microfilm (Central Branch)
- In-Library use of Ancestry.com

### Julia Ideson Building

500 McKinney  
Houston, TX 77002  
(713) 393-1313

- Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC)
- The Texas and Local History Collection

### *Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC)*

Includes archival, Texan and local history, and special collections departments with the primary objectives of locating, preserving, and making available to researchers the documentary evidence of Houston's history.

- **Archival Collections:** In its archival component, HMRC collects non-current records of area businesses, community and civic organizations, religious institutions, and other public or private groups which have influenced Houston's development. The manuscript component consists of the private papers and records of persons who helped shape the city's history. On deposit are the collections of civic leaders, businessmen, educators, politicians, and professional people. In addition to traditional manuscript and archival records, the collection includes non-textual materials documenting the area such as maps, photographs, films and tapes, and architectural drawings.
- **African-American Component:** Documents Houston's substantial black community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and adds vital insight into the city's history. African-American collections emphasize prominent individuals, long-established families, churches, black newspapers, cultural groups, community institutions, and business/labor activities.
- **Mexican-American Component:** Documents the explosive growth of Houston's Mexican-American community after 1910 and the preservation of a distinct cultural heritage and adaptation to life in the United States, through the records of community organizations, individuals and families, business and political activities, and social/cultural events.
- **Architectural Component:** The architectural component helps to document Houston's built environment, providing information about architects who practiced in Houston, and about extant and non-extant Houston buildings. Architectural drawings, which number approximately 125,000, comprise the largest segment of the component. Landscape,

interior, and engineering plans, as well as architectural photographs, are also included. Major collections include the papers of Alfred Finn, Harvin Moore, Howard Barnstone and Maurice Sullivan. The materials in this component are available by appointment.

- **Photographic Collections:** One of the most important components is historical photographs. Consisting of more than 3.5 million images of Houston from its nineteenth-century beginning to the present, the collection visually records all aspects of Houston's growth. HMRC builds this component through donations as small as one photograph and as large as the entire negative collections of longtime Houston commercial photographers. The Library History page features some of these historical photographs. A segment of the component is catalogued and available for research through the Texas and Local History Department. The remainder may be used by appointment. HMRC operates a photo preservation lab with copying facilities. Information about reproduction fees is available on request.
- **Oral History:** An active oral history program complements the archival and manuscript collections by providing information not available through written sources. The collection consists of reminiscences and analyses of events from persons who have a firsthand knowledge of significant political, cultural, and economic events in the growth of metropolitan Houston. Use of some of the tapes is restricted by the interviewee. Access to the oral history collection is by appointment.

### *The Texas and Local History Collection*

Offers reference service and research materials in every subject relating to Houston and Texas. It is a closed-stack, non-circulating collection. Users must register, and the staff works with researchers to suggest and locate sources of information.

- **Books:** With particular strength in history, biography and the social sciences, the collection includes many rare, early Texas imprints; theses and dissertations; privately published works of local interest; and works from Texas authors and Texas presses.
- **Periodicals:** Magazines of both general and scholarly interest date from the 1800's to the present. Newsletters represent a broad range of local and state organizations. Nineteenth and early twentieth century newspapers from many Texas cities and towns can be viewed on microfilm.
- **Government Publications:** The department has long been a depository for Texas state publications. Most state agencies are represented in the collection of 35,000+ documents such as annual, technical, and planning reports; statistical compilations; rules and guidelines; announcements; and legislative materials. The collection also holds publications from the City of Houston, the Metropolitan Transit Authority, and other regional government agencies.
- **Maps:** More than 1,500 maps illustrate the development of Houston and Texas, some with special emphasis such as railroad development, flood prone areas, or land use. Texas maps begin with the Spanish colonial period. Houston maps begin with the first hand-drawn map of the new city of Houston in 1836. Supplementing these are sets of aerial photographs beginning in 1935 and microfilmed Sanborn fire insurance maps for Houston and other Texas cities.

- Newspaper Clipping Files: Extensive files are maintained under the names of individuals and under subject headings for Houston and Texas. No index exists for Houston newspapers prior to 1976, and these files, some going back over 50 years, provide the only available subject access to news accounts of local events, institutions, and individuals.
- Special Materials: These include copies of old telephone directories; city directories for Houston and other Texas cities dating back to the 19th century; EPA reports related to the cleanup of hazardous waste sites in the area; the personal census for Texas from 1850-1910; school and college yearbooks; sheet music; and prints.

## **HMRC Resources Useful for Genealogical Researchers**

### **Biographical Dictionaries and Encyclopedias**

- Encyclopedia of Frontier Biography
- New Encyclopedia of Texas
- Who's Who of the South and Southwest
- Census
- Agricultural Schedules for Texas (1850-1880)
- Manufacturers Schedules for Texas (1880)
- Productions of Industry Schedules for Texas (1860-1870)
- City Directories for Houston  
The Texas Room has an almost complete collection of Houston city directories. (1866-1986)
- Criss-Cross directories (various titles and publishers; 1925-current)  
An index of directories for other Texas towns is available at the Reference Desk. Bound city directories may not be photocopied. Photocopies may be made from directories on microfiche. Digital images may be made with personal cameras without flash.
- Indexes to Periodicals and Newspapers
- Houston Chronicle
- Names Index to Houston Chronicle (on microfiche). Biographical articles. (1950s-1980)
- Houston Post Annual Indexes. Contains "Blue Pages" sections that list the names of hundreds of individuals referenced in articles. (1976-1985)
- Southwest Historical Quarterly Cumulative Index. (1897-1967)
- Texas Observer (1954-1981)
- Maps
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Houston  
Sanborn Maps are valuable historical tools for genealogists who want to learn about the history, growth, and development of American cities, towns, and neighborhoods.
- Texas Government Land Office Land Grant Maps  
These maps show the original grantees of each county.

### **Vertical Files-Biographical Collection**

### **Vertical Files-Houston Collection**

Searchable by paper index at reference desk

### **Yearbooks and Directories**

The Texas Room has numerous publications of social, professional and trade groups, some of which have photos and/or personal information about members. Check the HPL catalog (<http://www.houstonlibrary.org>). Using the Keyword search, check by types of industry and interests, with "HMRC-Texas Room" as the Location.

Examples of what you might find include:

- *Harris County Medical Society Pictorial Roster* (1960s-current) (610.25 H313)
- *Social Directory of Houston* (1950, 1953, 1955, 1957, 1959, 1961, 1963, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1973, 1975, 1977-2002) (V976.41 S678)
- *Gulf Coast Oil Directory* (665.5 G971)
- *Directory of Texas Artists, 1800-1945* (709.22764 G774)
- *History of the Texas League of Professional Baseball Clubs, 1888-1951* (796.357 R923)
- *Roster [of] Houston City Officials, Harris County Officials, 1837-1975, and Volunteer Fire Company Officers to 1894* (325.007 H526)
- *Who's Who in Texas Education, First Edition* (378.764 W628)
- *Yearbook ...of the Texas Federation of Garden Clubs, 1935/36* (635.9060764 T355)

**Clayton Library**  
**Center for Genealogical Research**  
5300 Caroline Street  
Houston, TX 77004  
(832) 393-2600

- Census: 1790-1930 - All US states and territories on microfilm
- Microprint Collection: As of January 2007 Clayton Library has more than 110,000 rolls of microfilm, 203,000 pieces of microfiche and 650 microcards, ranging in time from the 1600s into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and including materials from the USA and around the world.
- Federal/State/County: county and state histories, abstracts of records such as wills, deeds, marriages, court minutes, vital records, church, cemetery records and colonial collections of several states, city directories for major US cities.
- Military: federal service records and indexes from the American Revolution through the Philippine Insurrection.
- Passenger/Immigration: Naturalization records and a complete collection of National Archives passenger lists on microfilm for most eastern U.S. ports from 1820 through the end of the 19th century. Includes some border crossing records from Mexico and Canada.
- Texas and Houston Area: records of two Houston funeral homes: the Fogle-West Funeral Home (or Fogle West Undertaking Company) and the Boulevard Funeral Home (or Boulevard Undertaking Company). Information that may be found in funeral home records is: last name, first name, middle name, nicknames, sex, age, death date, parents, place interred, copy of a death certificate, an obituary, information on an autopsy, last residence, insurance records, military service information, and many other miscellaneous bits of information about a person.
- Houston Death Records and Index (Texas): The City of Houston began registering deaths in 1874. Clayton Library has transcripts of City of Houston death certificates from 1874-1894, 1896 and January through August 1900. Copies of records for the years 1895,

1987-1899, Sept 1900 through 1903, and beyond can be obtained from the Department of Health and Human Services at 8000 North Stadium Drive, Houston, Texas 77054.

- Texas Death Records and Index: The State of Texas began registering deaths in 1903. The index to deaths covers 1903 to 2002. Clayton also has Texas death certificates on microfilm from 1903 to 1976.
- Texas Birth Records and Index: The State of Texas began registering births in 1903. The index to births covers the years 1903 to 1999.
- Harris County Marriage Records and Indexes. Clayton has Harris County Marriage records, plus indexes where available, from 1837-1966, when records began statewide. They also have a statewide marriage index from 1966-2002.
- Maps: Clayton Library has an extensive collection of maps covering most US states and many foreign countries. The collection ranges in scope from colonial times to the present day and includes topographic, political, and historic maps in a wide variety of scales.
- Vertical Files: Clayton Library maintains an extensive collection of vertical file materials. Miscellaneous papers of genealogical interest are arranged under five sections: Family, USA, State, Foreign and Society. Examples of the types of materials found in the vertical files include: maps, pamphlets, newspaper clippings, translation tables, local history articles, research guidelines, etc.

## UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

### Art and Architecture Library

Most of UH Libraries' resources on architecture, art, and design are housed in the Jenkins Library's general collection in the library space in the new College of Architecture Building. Some of the more delicate books and those that are difficult to replace are kept in the Jenkins Closed Collection for increased protection. The Architecture & Art Special Collections contains over 1,500 volumes, including personal libraries of the prominent Houston architects Kenneth Franzheim and John Staub.

#### *William R. Jenkins Architecture & Art Library*

122 Architecture Building

University of Houston

Houston, TX 77204-4000

Telephone: (713) 743-2340

E-mail: [archlib@mail.uh.edu](mailto:archlib@mail.uh.edu)

### Special Collections

Former *Houston Post* editor and columnist George Fuermann amassed this extensive collection of Texas and Houston materials during the period from 1950 through 1971. During this time Fuermann wrote the Post column "Post Cards" and authored ten books on local history. The collection includes not only historical photographs, postcards, and documents, but Fuermann's own correspondence and research files and manuscripts for his books.

#### *Special Collections*

114 University Libraries  
University of Houston  
Houston, TX 77204-2000  
Telephone: (713) 743-9750  
FAX: (713) 743-9893  
E-mail: [speccol@lib.uh.edu](mailto:speccol@lib.uh.edu)

*Houston History Archives Repository*  
Suite 261-Special Collections Department  
M.D. Anderson Library – 2000  
University of Houston  
Houston, TX 77204-2000  
Telephone: (713) 743-9991  
FAX: (713) 743-5893  
E-mail: [tomkinswalsh@uh.edu](mailto:tomkinswalsh@uh.edu)

## RECORDS AVAILABLE ONLINE

Houston Public Library  
[www.houstonlibrary.org](http://www.houstonlibrary.org)

The Houston Public Library provides free access to subscription-based genealogical databases that are great resources for researchers of historic homes, they are listed below.

- Footnote.com
- Ancestry.com (In-Library use only)
- Heritage Quest Online (Houston library card required)
- Digital Sanborn Maps (Houston library card required)

Handbook of Texas Online  
<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/index.html>

The *Handbook of Texas* is a multidisciplinary encyclopedia of Texas history, geography, and culture.

Texas Archival Resources Online (TARO)  
<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/index.html>

*TARO* provides descriptions of the archival, manuscript, and museum collections in repositories across Texas available to the public. Consider these an extended table of contents which describe unique materials only available at the individual repositories. In most cases, the collections themselves are NOT available online.

Texas Heritage Online  
<http://www.texasheritageonline.org/>

*Texas Heritage Online* provides unified online access to Texas' historical documents and images for use by teachers, students, historians, genealogists, and other researchers. You can search for specific items or browse to help narrow down your interest.

Library of Congress

<http://www.loc.gov/chroniclingamerica/availableNewspapers.html>

The Houston Daily Post

Dec-1-1893 to Feb-28-1903

The Jewish Herald

Sept-24-1908 to Dec-29-1910

TRAIL: Texas Records and Information Locator

<http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/trail/>

Texas Historical Atlas

<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/>

Harris County on TXGen

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txharri2/>

Texas Almanac

<http://www.texasalmanac.com/>

Houston History magazine

[http://www.history.uh.edu/public\\_history/houston\\_history\\_project/houston\\_review/index.html](http://www.history.uh.edu/public_history/houston_history_project/houston_review/index.html)

Houston History Association

<http://www.houstonhistoryassociation.org>

## **CITY OF HOUSTON**

*Planning and Development Department*

Historic Preservation

611 Walker, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor

Houston, TX 77002

(713) 837-7701

The City has no central archives, and maintains very limited records. Old plat subdivision maps may be available, as is information on designated city historic landmarks and historic districts.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY PUBLICATIONS ABOUT HOUSTON**

Many of these publications are out of print. They can frequently be found, however, in circulation at local libraries or in research facilities for in-house use. They can sometimes be found as used books on the internet, in second-hand book stores or at local book sales.

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