

River District Association



Building History

A Guide To Architectural Research In The Rock River Valley



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BUILDING HISTORY

You own a lovely home that you are proud to call your own. Or maybe you purchased an industrial or commercial property to showcase your growing business. In both scenarios, someone owned it before you. Someone built it, cared for it, and made changes through the years to your structure. Your building has a history. By being a current owner, you are not only the steward for the past, but also adding to the history for the future. This guide will help you find out the “who, when and what” of your property.

Researching your house can be fun, fascinating and completely engrossing. This pamphlet will help you begin, offering advice on how to identify basic information about your house and your neighborhood. It is designed to take you systematically through the process.

Using the resources discussed here, you will be well on your way to indentifying: the date your house was built, if an architect is associated with its design, who had it built, and the changes that have been made to it over the years. Be sure to read the appendix as well, where detailed information on resources can be found.

However, beware! Research can become addictive. It can also be frustrating. You may exhaust every source possible and still not find the answers to your questions. But no matter how many questions remain unanswered, you will have unearthed some interesting information, learned a little more about your community, and become familiar with some important public institutions in the city.

So, have fun, and good luck!

TIP:

Getting Started

To best organize your time while conducting this research, read through this pamphlet and identify all the resources you want to consult while at a particular library or historical society.

You may start at any point in the process, depending on the age of your house and what information you may have to begin with. Regardless, each step affords different kinds of information and can offer varying degrees of reward.

Abbreviations used in this pamphlet refer to:

HPC

Rockford Historic Preservation Commission

RPL

Rockford Public Library, Main Branch

National Register

National Register of Historic Places

What you need to know to begin

Before you launch your research project, it would be good to have a general idea of your house's style and the approximate date of construction.

If your house is newly purchased, the real estate listing undoubtedly had a date typed into the appropriate box. While you shouldn't assume that this date is correct, it may help get you started.

The architectural style of your house can also provide you with clues to its approximate age so you know where to begin your research. There are many books available to help you formulate an intelligent guess as to style and date. Some good style-books are:

A Field Guide to American Houses, Virginia and Lee McAlester (1984)
[RPL: 917.304927 M114F]

American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles, Marcus Whiffen (1974)

The American House, Mary Mix Foley (1980) [RPL: 728.0973 F663A]

A Field Guide to American Architectures, Carole Rifkind (1993)
[RPL: 720.973 R1F]

Identifying American Architecture, John J.G. Blumenson (1981)

What Style is It? A Guide to American Architectures, John C. Poppliers, S. Allen Chambers, Jr., and Nancy B. Schwartz (Revised 2003)
[RPL: 720.973 P831W]

Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms, 1600 - 1945, John J. Blumson (1981) [RPL: 720.973 BLU]

Some common styles in the Rock River Valley and their most distinctive features:

Front Gable or Worker's Cottage (beginning 1870s) - narrow house, steep roof, off-center front door

Romanesque Revival (1880-1900) - large arched openings, masonry walls, towers with conical roofs, asymmetrical facade

Italianate (1860-1900) - widely overhanging eaves, decorative brackets, tall, narrow arched windows

Queen Anne (1880s-1900) - steep roof usually with a prominent gable, porches, variety of building materials

Prairie (early 1900s) - low pitched hipped roof, wide overhanging eaves, horizontal detailing

Bungalow (early 1900s) - low pitched roof, wide eaves, brick walls, and a bay window with art glass

American Four Square (1900-1930) - cube shaped, hipped roof, broad front porch, little ornament

Colonial Revival (1880-1955) - cube shaped, gabled roof, symmetrical, prominent front door



Bungalow



American Four Square



Queen Anne



Italianate

TIP:

Dating Architectural Styles

Most new styles in architecture were first seen on the East Coast. In A Field Guide To American Houses, for instance, the Italianate Style is dated as early as 1850, although it didn't become popular in the Midwest until the 1870's.

**Rockford Historic
Preservation Commission**

City Hall Building
Community Development
425 East State Street
Second Floor
Rockford, IL 61104

(815) 987-5618 phone
(815) 967-6933 fax

HPC Secretary: Ginny Gregory

Email:
ginny.gregory@ci.rockford.il.us

Website:
www.cityofrockford.net

Monthly meetings are held at various times in Conference Room B on the second floor of City Hall. Please contact the HPC Secretary, Monday-Friday 8am-5pm, for more information.

Historic Districts

The HPC and the City of Rockford have designated several Historic Districts, and specific Historic Landmark Buildings, within the City. By determining if your building is within the boundaries of a Historic District, or has been designated as a landmark, you will be able to better determine what resources may be available through the City.

As of April 2004, the Historic Districts included:

1. Haight Village (also on the National Register)
2. Indian Terrace (including Beattie Park)
3. Garfield Avenue (600-900 blocks)
4. Brown's Hills/Knightsville (most of the area lying between North Second Street and the Scandinavian Cemetery, plus the four houses just north of the YMCA on the west side of North Second Street)
5. Northeast State and Main (201, 203 and 211 West State Street, plus 107 and 109 North Main Street)

In addition, East State Street from the Rock River up to and including the Faust Landmark and some buildings on the cross streets are in the East Rockford Historic District, which is on the National Register but has not been designated as a local historic district

The following buildings have been designated as Local Landmarks by the HPC and the City of Rockford:

1. Graham-Ginestra House, 1115 South Main Street.
2. Herrick-Logli Cobblestone House, 2127 Broadway
3. Lake-Peterson House, 1313 East State Street
4. The Coronado Theatre, 312-324 North Main Street
5. Freeman School (now Freeman Square), 910 Second Avenue
6. The Midway Theatre, 721 East State Street
7. The Anderson Building, 803 North Church Street
8. Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum, 411 Kent Street
9. Burpee Museum of National History, 737 and 813 North Main Street
10. Erlander Home, 404 South Third Street
11. The Times Theatre, 222 - 230 North Main Street
12. The Seventh Street Passenger Depot, 701 - 703 Seventh Street
13. Four Squires Building, 203 West State Street
14. West Middle School, 1900 North Rockton Avenue
15. East High School, 2929 Charles Street
16. Garrison School, 1105 North Court Street
17. Shumway Market Building, 713 East State Street
18. Liebling (Jackson Piano) Building, 330 North Main Street
19. Illinois National Guard Armory, 605 North Main Street
20. Rockford City Hall, 425 East State Street
21. Winnebago County Courthouse Annex/Jail, 403 Elm Street
22. Chick House, 119-123 South Main Street
23. Elks Club building, 210 West Jefferson Street
24. Lincoln Middle School, 1500 Charles Street

The following additional sites are listed on the National Register, but have not been designated locally as landmarks:

Lysander Jacoby house, 2 Jacoby Place

Memorial Hall, 211 North Main Street

Amos Catlin Spafford House, 501 North Prospect Street

Rockford Morning Star Building, 127 North Wyman Street

The Brown Building, 228 South Main Street



Lake-Peterson House

Lysander Jacoby House



Coronado Theater

Amos Catlin Spafford House



HPC & City of Rockford Historic Resources Survey

There have been several inventory and research surveys in Rockford. They are:

1978-1981 Survey

All areas within the 1871 boundaries

Downtown 1994 Survey

200 structures downtown

East State 1997 Survey

Covers the 1700-1900 blocks of East State Street

Victorian Village 1999 Survey

Main & Auburn 1999 Survey

Access to any survey can be obtained by contacting the HPC Secretary or by visiting the RPL Local History Room.

TIP:

Head Start

If you think your home has already been catalogued by a Rockford HPC Survey, it's best to start there. Often times, you will find the approximate build date as well as any other research that the members of HPC have been able to find on the building.

City Building Permit

Through the Freedom of Information Act, you may submit a request to the Rockford Building Department for copies of any permits issued on the property. This may include the original building permit, as well as any subsequent permits for changes to the property. The City does not have complete records prior to 1920, so any structure built before that may not have a building permit on file. A Freedom of Information Request Form is included in the Appendix. To request your permit information, go to the Permit Center on the first floor of the Rockford City Hall.

Rockford Public Library

215 N. Wyman St.
Rockford, IL 61101

SUMMER HOURS

Monday -Thursday:
9:00 AM - 9:00 PM
Friday: 9:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Saturday: 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
Sunday: Closed

WINTER HOURS

Monday-Thursday:
9:00 AM - 9:00 PM
Friday & Saturday:
9:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Sunday: 1:00-5:00 PM

(815) 965-6731 Phone
(815) 965-0866 Fax

RPL Local History Room

The RPL Local History Room has a plethora of information about Rockford. The Librarians that work in the Local History Room are well versed in the resources available, and often times have a great working knowledge of the regional history. Although each search is different, there are several resources that you may want to start off with right away.

Fire Insurance Maps

Fire Insurance maps offer a wealth of information. They indicate lot sizes, the outlines of buildings, their heights and materials through a special color coding system, and any changes made to lot or buildings, and when those changes were made (approximately). You may also find build dates and/or street name changes listed in these maps. By comparing maps of the same neighborhood in different years, you can plot the changing character of that neighborhood.

The Sanborn Map Company produced sets of maps for the Winnebago County area. A 1930 set of maps is available at the Local History Room, and a 1950 set is available at the Rockford Community Development Department. Direct copies of earlier versions from the 1800's are available to purchase through the Sanborn company directly at www.sanborn.com.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Rockford, Illinois, Vols. 1 and 2.* 1931. [RPL, Local History Room]

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Rockford, Illinois, Vols. 1 and 2.* 1951. [HPC/City Hall Second Floor]

City Directories

A set of directories dating back to 1857 is available in the Local History Room. From 1857 through 1902, residents were listed alphabetically by last name - much in the same way as a modern phone book would be today. However, starting in 1902, the directories have information listed by physical street address. This may be a good way to obtain a build date, the name of the first owners/tenants, or to track how the building was used over time.

Photographic Research

There are many books available at the library to potentially provide you with historical photographs of your building. Contact a Librarian to assist you in locating and selecting books appropriate for your search. Another excellent source of historical photographic records is the Midway Village Museum Center on Guilford Road.

Rockfordianna Files

Over the years, the staff of RPL have collected an eclectic mix of Rockford information that is contained in the Rockfordianna files. While there are no specific guidelines about what the files contain, it'll certainly be a lot of fun to do a quick search through this resource.

TIP:

Addresses

The City changed the street numbering system in 1893 to standardize addresses in Rockford. Any research prior to 1893 should include the possibility that the structure was known by a different numeric, or street, address. Check the 1892 map of Rockford in the RPL Local History Room to make sure you have the correct address.

County & Township Records

In researching the chain of ownership for a particular property, the County Recorder's Office and the Rockford Township Assessor's Office are two great resources.

County Recorder's Office

Although the staff of the Recorder's office cannot do the work for you, they are very willing to assist you in your search. It will be necessary to first obtain either the Tax ID number for the property (usually located on your current tax bill) or the legal description of the property, which may be found on a deed or contract to purchase a property. If you do not have either of these pieces of information, the County Recorder's office has a computer terminal that will help you convert a street address.

Some of their older records are kept on microfilm, and may be difficult to read.

Rockford Township Assessor's Office

The Rockford Township Assessor may have information that predates the records of the City. The Assessor has set up a nice website where the public can do a simple search on a property and obtain some useful information. Check out www.rockfordtownshipassessor.net for more information.

Information on Architects

Many local buildings and residences were designed by local architects. Bradley & Bradley Architects as well as the successor to Jesse Barloga's firm, Tyson & Billy, are two companies with deep historical roots in the Rockford community. If you suspect that either firm may have designed your building, a call to their offices may produce results.

Many architects from the Chicago area also did commissions in Rockford. Although Rockford may not have an abundance of projects by a particular architect, the collected projects in the greater Midwest might be significant. If you have been able to determine that an architect was used to build your structure, you might be able to find information at the card catalogue of the Chicago Historical Society or the Ryerson & Burnham Library. Other, more general resources, include:

- American Architects* by Lawrence Wodenhouse (1976)
- Jesse A. Barloga 1888-1947* (1988). [R720/977331 A673]
- Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* by Henry and Elsie Withey (1956/1970)
- Chicago Architects Design* (1982)
- History of Chicago* (Vol. 3) by A.T. Andreas (1884-1886)
- Industrial Chicago: The Building Interests* (vol. 1) (1891-96)
- MacMillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, ed. Adolf K. Placzek (1982)

A good mystery

Historical research is often compared to reading a good mystery. By now you should know who did it, where, with what, and maybe why. But your search may have just begun. A listing of additional resources, places to visit, and collections is included in the appendix. Make sure to take advantage of the many great local resources to learn about the storied history of the Rock River Valley!

Winnebago County Recorder
County Administration Building
404 Elm Street, Room 405
Rockford, IL 61101

(815) 987-3100

Hours:

8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday - Friday

Rockford Township Assessor's Office

401 West State Street, Suite 101
Rockford, IL 61101

(815) 965-0300

Hours:

8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.,
Monday-Friday

The Ryerson and Burnham Library

The Art Institute of Chicago
Michigan Avenue at Adams St.
(312) 443-3666

Hours vary.

The Ryerson and Burnham Library at the AIC is located on the south side of the ground floor, just opposite the stairway down.

This is a wonderful source of information on the architecture of Chicago and its designers and builders. In order to use the library, however, you must either be a member of the Art Institute, or obtain an "Info Pass" referral from your local library. While this is not as easy as simply walking in, it is not at all difficult, and the resources here are fascinating.

Other Printed Resources

Rockford History Books

Burke, George Thomas, comp. 1982. *Forest City Firelog 1881 - 1981*. Rockford, IL. [RPL: R363.378 F716]
Interesting account of Rockford Fire Logs organized by year. An interesting way to study history of the community.

Church, Charles. *History of Rockford and Winnebago County, IL: 1834 to the Civil War*. Rockford, IL: W.P. Lamb, 1900. [RPL: 977.33 C47] Early history account of Rockford's early settlers. Several circulating copies.

Daly, Charles L. *The City of Rockford and Her Men of Affairs*. 1920. [RPL: 977.33 D17]

Grimes, Mollie. *The Stewart Story: 100 Years on Main Street*. Rockford: D. J. Stewart & Co., 1966. [RPL: R917.733 G88]

***Interesting Facts and Figures About Rockford Illinois*. Rockford, IL: New Illinois Stationery Company. 1912. [RPL: R720.977331 N714 1912]**

***Interesting Facts and Figures About Rockford Illinois*. Rockford, IL: New Illinois Stationery Company. 1915. [RPL: R720.977331 N714 1915]**

Lundin, Jon W. *Rockford: An Illustrated History*. Tarzana, CA: American Historical Press, 1989. [RPL: 977.331 L962R]
Recommended. Nice overview of Rockford history, places and people. Some good photographs of Rockford commercial districts.

Molyneaux, John L. 2000. *African Americans in Early Rockford: 1834 - 1871*. Rockford, IL: Rockford Public Library. [RPL: 977.331 M731A] An excellent history of Rockford's early African-American population, material often overlooked in other general history books.

Nelson, C. Hal. 1968. *Sinnissippi Saga*. Rockford, IL: Winnebago County Illinois Sesquicentennial Committee. [RPL: 977.33 N31] Index to *Sinnissippi Saga* [RPL: R977333 N31]

Nelson, Hal, compiler and editor. *We the People of Winnebago County*. Mendota, Illinois: Wayside Press, 1975. [RPL: 977.331 N425W] As the title states, an account of the various ethnic groups that made up the Rockford area. Anecdotal, but the overview is well worth a look.

Oberg, David M. *Robert Tinker's Rockford: Walking Tours for Children and Adults*, Rockford, IL: Tinker Swiss Cottage, 2000. [RPL: 917.7331 O125R] Geared for both children and adults. An architectural term primer can be found in the back. Organized as a walking or driving tour through several of Rockford's neighborhoods.

Rockford Historical Society. *Combined Atlases of Winnebago County, Illinois, 1971-1892-1905; and Atlas of Boone and Winnebago Counties, Illinois, 1866*. [RPL, Local History Room]

Rowe, Ford F. *Rockford Streamlined: 1834 - 1941*. Rockford: Graphic Arts Group, 1941. [RPL: R977.33 R79]

Turpoff, Glen. *They Too Cast Shadows*. Rockford, IL: Northern Illinois Building Contractors Association, 1999. [RPL: 690.0977331 T957T]

Whittaker, Wayne. *The Rockford Story: 1852-1952*. Rockford: Chamber of Commerce, 1956. [RPL: 977.33 W59]

Workers Of the Writers' Program of the Works Project Administration, compilers. *Rockford*. Rockford: Graphic Arts Corp., 1941. [RPL: 917.733 W93]

Neighborhood Resources

Baie, Lyle. 1987. *Rockford's Harlem Park: The People and The Times*. Rockford, IL: Lyle Baie and John Gile Communications. [RPL: 790.068 B152R] Describes Harlem Park, a large amusement park on Rockford's Northwest side. Some description of the neighborhoods surrounding, primarily Edgewater and Churchill's Grove.

***Brown's Hill/Knightsville History (1985)*. [R977.331 B885]**

***Calvin Park Boulevard: A Neighborhood Community*. Calvin Park Boulevard Association (2001). [R977.331 C168C]**

***Jesse A. Barloga 1888-1947 (1988)*. [R720/977331 A673]**

***National Avenue (1987)*. [R720.977331 N277]**

General Interest Publications & Websites

Butchart, Ronald E. *Local Schools: Exploring Their History*

Howard, Hugh. *How Old Is This House?* [RPL: 728.028 H849H]

Howe, Barbara J. et al. *Houses and Homes: Exploring Their History*.

Hutchins, Nigel. *Restoring Old Houses: An Illustrated Step-By Step Guide to Giving New Life to Period Houses*. [RPL: 643.7 H974R] Includes chapter on research and planning.

Kahn, Renee and Ellen Meagher. 1984. *Preserving Porches*. New York: Henry Holt and Company. [RPL: 728.028 K15P]

Kitchen, Judith L. *Respectful Rehabilitation: Caring for Your Old House; A Guide for Owners and Residents*. Includes a chapter on learning about old houses.

Light, Sally. *House Histories: A Guide to Tracing the Genealogy of Your Home*.

Stevenson, Katherine Cole and H. Ward Jandl. *Houses By Mail. A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1986. [RPL 728.373 S847H]

National Park Service Preservation Briefs: Technical information on a wide variety of preservation topics everything from mothballing a vacant building to restoring old wooden windows.

<http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/care/goodguides.htm>

Preservation Books: Publications available through the National Trust for Historic Preservation

<http://www.preservationbooks.org>

Local History Museums

Erlander Home Museum & Swedish Historical Society

404 South 3rd Street
Rockford, IL 61104

Focus on Swedish Heritage in Rock River Valley.

Ethnic Heritage Museum

1129 South Main Street
Rockford, IL 61101
815/962-7402

Focus on immigrant history of Southwest Rockford.

Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum

411 Kent Street
Rockford, IL 61102-2915
815/964-2424
www.tinkercottage.com

Some photographs of Southwest Rockford and the area surrounding the cottage. Years of personal journals kept by Robert Tinker, prominent Rockford businessman and one-term mayor. For information, call Donna Langford, curator.

Midway Village & Museum Center

6799 Guilford Road
Rockford, IL 61107-2613
815/397-9112
www.midwayvillage.com

History of Rockford area from time of first settlement to present. Living history village depicting life in Rockford at the turn of the century. Photograph collection includes photographs of Rockford's Central Business District (State Street and Main) and some of South Rockford.

Photographic Research

Commercial and Manufacturing

Brown, Eugene and F. Ford Rowe. *Industrial and Picturesque Rockford.* Rockford, Illinois: Forest City Publishing Company, 1891. [RPL: R917.733 B82]

Buck Brothers & Co., Brokers. *Illustrated Manufacturing - Rockford, Ills.* Rockford: Smith Publishing Co., 1892. [RPL: R917.733 B85]

Streets and Byways of Old Rockford: Older Rockford postcards primarily of commercial buildings available at
<http://www.scuttlebuttsmallchow.com/rockford.html>

Penny Postcards from Illinois: Older Winnebago County and Rockford postcards available at:
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/il/winnebago/postcards/ppcs-winne.html>

www.Ebay.com.

Search with Rockford IL. Many times older postcards available of well-known commercial buildings or landmarks.

Rockford (1912), R720.977331 N714

Rockford (Chamber of Commerce, 1917), R917.7331 R682r

Residential

Rockford Illinois (1902), R917.733 R5910

Mostly prominent homes in a variety of neighborhoods

Homes Magazine Covers (1982-1983), R720.977331 H767

Some residential and some commercial



CITY OF ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS
 BUILDING DEPARTMENT
 425 E. STATE STREET
 ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS 61104

PHONE: (815) 987-5550

FAX: (815) 967-4243

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Name: _____ (please print)

Company Name: _____

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone No. _____ Fax No. _____

Description of requested record: _____

Property Address: _____

Purpose for the Request: _____

Please indicate if you wish to inspect the above-captioned records or would like a copy of them (copy cost

is \$.25 per page). Please check one: Inspection _____ Copy _____ Both _____

Do you wish to have copies certified? Yes _____ No _____

I hereby certify that I am not seeking the above-captioned records for the purpose of furthering a commercial enterprise.

Date	Time	Signature
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FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Date received: _____ Date Response Due: _____

Records made available: _____

Copies made? _____ Yes _____ No _____ How many? _____ Fee \$ _____

[] No records of this type exist in this department or unable to locate the records in your request.

Request Denied: _____ Why? _____

Notes: _____

Signature _____ Date _____