



King County

Department of Executive Services
Records and Licensing Services Division
Archives and Records Management Section
Archives

Ten Steps Toward a History of a House (Seattle & King County)

Sources for researching historical information on a building and its occupants

- 1) **House photographs:** From 1937-1941 photographs were taken of every building in King County and until 2003 later photographs were taken of new buildings and some building remodels. To order building photographs and supplemental Property Record Cards, first locate the **parcel number** for the property. If unknown, you can find it by entering the property address at the [King County Parcel Viewer](#) website or the King County Assessor's at (206) 296-7300. To order contact the Puget Sound Regional Archives at (425) 564-3940 or PSBranchArchives@sos.wa.gov.
- 2) **Property owners:** Following resources can be used to compile a list of property owners:
a) King County [Property Record Cards \(PRC\)](#) 1937-1972 (most PRCs **do not list all owners**) located at [Puget Sound Regional Archives](#) (Bellevue). **PRCs are organized by parcel number.** **b)** King County [Assessment Rolls](#) 1891/92-1941 (every 5th year) located at Puget Sound Regional Archives, Bellevue. The Assessment Rolls are organized by legal description. Entries include the property owner, assessed value, and property taxes paid. **c)** King County [Deeds](#) located at the [King County Archives](#) (1215 E. Fir St., Seattle). Indexes for 1853-1975 are organized by date range (i.e., 1853-1903, 1903-1907, etc.), then alphabetically by last name. The King County Archives (1853-present) and Puget Sound Regional Archives (1853-1971 only) both have sets of indexes. For 1976-present, searches can be done online at the [King County Recorder's Records Search](#) site. Images of deeds and other recordings from August 1991 to present can be viewed on line. **d)** Seattle [Tract Books](#) (aka Property Abstracts) 1907-ca. 1990. Land purchasers and deed references, organized by property legal description. Located at Seattle [Dept. of Planning & Development \(DPD\) Microfilm Library](#) (700 Fifth Ave., Suite 2000, Seattle). **e)** King County Parcel Viewer lists property sales from the mid-1980s to present.
- 3) **Atlases:** Seattle atlases published in numerous editions by Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. (1884 ff), Baist Real Estate Atlases (1905-1912), and Kroll Map Company (1912 ff). Of the three publications, Sanborn maps provide the most precise building information, including building footprint, # of stories, type of building material, usage, etc. Kroll and Baist Atlases show property lines and legal descriptions, list owners of unplatted property (acreage), and show the approximate locations of buildings. Sanborn maps on microfilm are located at **a)** [University of Washington Libraries, Microform & Newspaper Collections](#) **b)** [Seattle Public Library, Downtown Branch](#) **c)** [Bellevue Library, King County Library System](#). **d)** Digital Sanborn Maps are available through the Seattle Public Library as "Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970" and the King County Library as "Sanborn Maps (Washington State)" **e)** Baist's Real Estate Atlas of Surveys of Seattle, Wash. 1905 Edition is available through the Seattle Public Library webpage and 1912 Edition is available through the [DorpatSherradLomont](#) webpage. Baist and Kroll volumes are located at UW Library Special Collections and Seattle Public Library, Central Branch.
- 4) **Subdivision maps:** Also called plat maps. Required to be filed with the county before any developed property can be sold. Include original street names, developers, lot lines, date plat was filed with the county, etc. The first King County subdivision map was filed in 1853, followed by thousands of plats since then. Copies are available at **a)** [King County Recorders Office](#), King County Administration Building, 4th floor, Seattle, or online at the [Recorder's Records Search](#) site. **b)** [King County Archives](#) (up to 11"x17" copies only), **c)** [Kroll Map Company](#), 2700 3rd Avenue, Seattle. **d)** Unrecorded plats (aka Assessor Plats) can be obtained from the King Co Archives.
- 5) **Building permits:** Most permits include information on building owner, architect, builder, date issued, and in some cases, building inspector notes and building completion date. **a)** Seattle building permits start ca. 1895 and are located at the [Seattle DPD Microfilm Library](#). **b)** Unincorporated King County building permits start ca. 1970 and are located at [King County Department of Permitting and Environmental Review \(DPER\) Records counter](#) (Snoqualmie)

- 6) **Census:** US Census for Washington from 1860 to 1940. Microfilm of census located at [National Archives, Pacific Northwest Branch \(Seattle\)](#) and [Seattle Public Library](#). Available online through [Heritage Quest Online](#) (1860-1920, 1940) and [Ancestry](#). (1860-1940). King County Censuses compiled by Washington Territory and State (1854-1892) are available through the Washington State Digital Archives.
- 7) **Building resident and business occupants:**
 - a) Annual Polk and other Seattle directories (1872-1996) list businesses and residents.
 - b) Starting in 1938, the Polk Seattle directories added a reverse directory organized by street address listing resident or business.
 - c) Directories of King County and its towns are located at the [Seattle Public Library](#) and [University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections](#). The Seattle Public Library has a few directories available online through its [Seattle City Directory Collection](#) website. Although not complete, an extensive listing of King County directories is available through the UW Libraries' [Special Collections City Directories](#) website (www.lib.washington.edu/specialcoll/directories/) (includes directories of other NW towns).
- 8) **Biographies and other historical information:** Northwest newspaper and magazine card file indexes include biographical, business, events and other topics concerning local history. Separate indexes are located at the [Seattle Public Library's Seattle Room](#) and [University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections](#). The Seattle Times full text database (1900-present) is available on-line through the Seattle Public Library and the University of Washington Library.
- 9) **Local histories:** Neighborhood and town histories are useful. If one is not available on the area you are researching, locate a nearby neighborhood or town history to get an understanding of how that region developed. [4Culture](#) (Seattle) has bibliographies of King County towns and cities available online. Other histories that could be useful include nearby schools, parks, churches, businesses, libraries, trolley lines, etc. Inquire at the local library or nearby institutions.
- 10) **Former occupants, heirs, etc.:** Contact former building occupants or their heirs, neighborhood old timers, and long-time residents for information about previous house occupants.

Other Sources:

General Land Office Surveys (1855-1890s): General Land Office (GLO) Surveys are usually the first surveys of an area. With few exceptions, these were completed before settlers could homestead the land. GLO surveys include both maps and field notes. Field notes include information on original tree and ground coverage, location and size of streams and lakes, trails, and roads. **a)** Microfilm copies are located at the [University of Washington Libraries, Microform & Newspaper Collections, Suzzallo Library Building](#). **b)** On-line at the US Bureau of Land Management's [Land Status & Cadastral Records Viewer](#) site.

Homestead records: Records of land patents, which include original homesteads and public land purchases from the United States Government. **a)** [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) Land Patent Search](#) site (www.gloreports.blm.gov). Search by homesteader or legal description (Section-Township-Range). An abstract of land patent records that includes homesteader, date land patent was issued, legal description, and acreage. **b)** Copies of original land patent files can be acquired from the National Archives and Records Administration. Ordering instructions online at NARA's [Research Our Records](#) site (www.archives.gov/research/).

Washington State Digital Archives Historical Records online. Ongoing project to scan and index each county's marriage, naturalization, death, military, land, and census records, and indexes to territorial civil and criminal court cases. Search online at the [Washington State Digital Archives](#) (www.digitalarchives.wa.gov).

Seattle building research: A detailed on-line guide, [Researching the History of Seattle Buildings](#), is available from the Seattle Public Library at www.spl.org/Documents/collection/Building_History.pdf

Genealogical and local historical societies, cemeteries, local and neighborhood newspapers, birds eye views, death records, probate records, civil and criminal cases, state penitentiary prisoner records, etc. are just a few additional resources useful for house history research.