



# House History

A Research Guide

## Introduction

Outside of genealogy, one of the most frequent research requests we receive at the library involves learning the history of one's house, especially if it is a historic home in Muncie's oldest neighborhoods. This is a research guide to help you get started investigating the history of your house. Let us know what you find out by calling Carnegie Library at [747-8208](tel:747-8208) or emailing [lhgresearch@munpl.org](mailto:lhgresearch@munpl.org).

## Land Records

[BeaconGIS](#) is an online public access tool that provides information on public records, county and city information, and Geographic Information Systems. This tool gives a legal description of the property, names of the current and other previous owners, and the date of construction (although be sure to fact check that as it can be inaccurate). Another source for this type of information would be the [Delaware County Assessor's](#) office in downtown Muncie at 100 W. Main St.

In order to establish a line of property transfer, you will need to consult the transfer records at the [Delaware County Auditor's](#) office also located at 100 W. Main St. These records tell us the names of the owners (current and new), the date the property was transferred, and the value of the land as well as that of the buildings or improvements. Working from the earliest owner/date you know, you will go backwards in time until you find the date of construction for your house. The Carnegie Branch of Muncie Public Library has the county transfer records from 1851-1903.

Once you have names and dates, you should be able to obtain the original deed records for the property (i.e. the proof of ownership) either at the County Auditor's office for the more recent records or our [Digital Resource Library](#) for deeds spanning 1827-1961. The original deed records are kept with the [Delaware County Recorder's](#) office. The deed records will give you information such as who owned the plot of land, how much the land was worth, the size of the plot, and how it was transferred.

In order to see **original land deed patents**, go to the [Bureau of Land Management](#). Another resource for original land deed patents and other records would be the [National Archives](#).

## Maps

When researching your house history, maps and atlases can provide you with some information on what your home and the surrounding neighborhood looked like at the time as well as the outbuildings that may or may not have existed on your property. Ball State's Digital Media Repository has an online collection called [Muncie and Delaware County Historical Maps and Atlases](#). Another good resource at Ball State University is the [GIS Research and Map Collection](#) within Bracken Library. Muncie Public Library also has a collection of historical maps at Carnegie Library that will show you how the city grew and the streets changed over time, which may have affected the history of your home. Last, the [Office of Information and GIS Services](#) has searchable, historic maps on their website.

Atlases and plat maps, especially useful for rural areas, can reveal land ownership and could include drawings and photographs of prominent farm houses. Plat maps will also tell you the original property description. Muncie Public Library has a collection of [plat books](#) in the catalog but you can also find digital scans of historical survey maps through the [Muncie Neighborhoods](#) organization.

Another map resource you should consult in your research is the **Sanborn Map collection**. These are detailed maps of U.S. cities and towns in the 19th and 20th centuries that were created to allow fire insurance companies to assess their total liability in urbanized areas of the U.S. The Sanborn Maps will give you a range for date of construction, show the evolution of the property through additions as well as the changes in the neighborhood, street names/addresses, a physical description of the home (i.e. building materials, number of stories, rooflines, etc.), its use, and the outbuildings on the property. When using the Sanborn Maps, start with the earliest one and work through them chronologically. At Carnegie Library, we have the Sanborn Maps on [microfilm](#) and [CD-Rom](#), but an easier resource to use is the digitized collection of early Sanborn Maps found on Ball State University's [Digital Media Repository](#) which includes an interactive [Muncie Sanborn Map Locator](#). The highest quality scans of the original copies of Sanborn Maps from Indiana can be found online through Indiana University's [Indiana Sanborn Maps collection](#).

If you want to research the historical landscape, i.e. the physical features, of your house's location, consult the [U.S. Geological Survey Library](#). You can explore historical topographic maps at this [link](#).

## Architectural Records

If you would like to know more about the Architectural History of your home, the Andrew Seager Archives of the Built Environment (formerly the Drawings + Documents Archive) in the Architecture Building at Ball State University is a good community resource to consult. They have a great [house history guide](#) geared more towards the architectural history of a house for

those beginning their research. You can contact them by either calling [765-285-8441](tel:765-285-8441) or emailing [libarchives@bsu.edu](mailto:libarchives@bsu.edu).

If you know the date of construction of your house and want to learn more about its building history, you can also consult the city directories from that time period to obtain a list of builders and developers listed in that area. One of them may have been involved in building your house. When consulting the city directories, be sure to pay attention to the owner's occupation as that may give you some clues to who may have built the house in terms of associations with businesses and other similar instances you may find in your research. For example, if a previous owner worked for A business and it was known that A business liked working with B builder, then possibly B builder could have been involved with your house somehow. As another example, the previous owner could have worked for one of those builders/developers, so it's a good chance that the association may have extended to the building of the house.

Other sources of information that may be helpful are newspaper articles, court cases, and mechanic's liens. All Muncie newspapers are available via microfilm at Carnegie Library. The Delaware County court records from around 1827-1960 are also available. Some records may be found online through the [Digital Resource Library](#). Court records after 1960 are available at the [Delaware County Clerk's](#) office.

## Genealogy

Once you have the names of people who owned or were associated with the home, you can start learning about aspects of their lives and how that influenced the building and evolution of the house by using genealogy research methods. A great place to start would be the [Muncie city directories](#) available at Carnegie Library. The city directories will provide the name of the resident, their spouse if married, their occupation, and addresses for both their residential home and place of business if applicable. From 1925 on, you can also search by address in the city directories if you don't know the name of the home's owner. Early city directories can be found on Ball State University's [Digital Media Repository](#).

You may also want to check the Uniform House Numbering System documents within Carnegie Library's Special Collections (SC16) to see if your house had an address change. On December 26, 1974, the City of Muncie passed an ordinance to make the house numbering system consistent within Muncie, and this eventually extended to the rural routes and county roads. At the time, the house numbers were very scattered, not logically arranged, and nearly 60% of all buildings in Muncie were wrongly posted. The city also had duplicate street names. The goal of this project was to help emergency services, postal workers, delivery services, and out of town visitors find their destinations. The Uniform House Numbering System Collection includes a proposed plan of this process as well as the address changes that the city implemented from 1975-1989.

Another great place to start would be the Muncie newspapers, which are all available here at Carnegie Library on microfilm. One of the biggest sources of information that you can find through the newspapers is obituaries, which contains a lot of biographical information about the person. Check the [Digital Resource Library](#) to see if we have the name and obituary source information online, or consult the card catalog in the microfilm room at Carnegie Library. The newspapers may also contain other biographical information like marriages and engagements, awards and big accomplishments, and societies that the person may have belonged to. You may even find information about or historic photographs of the house.

Another good resource is [Ancestry.com](#) or [AncestryLibrary.com](#), which is available onsite at Muncie Public Library. Through these sites, you can also access the city directories as well as vital information such as birth, marriage, death dates and places, funeral/burial place, family members, and so much more. Further, Ancestry Library includes the U.S. Federal Census up to 1940 with the 1950 census currently in the process of being uploaded to the site. You can search the full [1950 census](#) on the official National Archives site. Census records will give you information on who lived in the household including their ages, relationships to the head of the household, marital status, place of birth, level of education, and occupation. Another source of vital information for people are funeral and burial records. These can often be found on FindaGrave.com, which may also include photographs and obituaries. Muncie Public Library also has a collection of Delaware County funeral and cemetery resources available in house at Carnegie Library and online through the [Digital Resource Library](#).

**Wills and probates** will not only provide death information and names of relatives but also tell you how a person lived and the things, goods, and services they used. This can paint a picture of what life was like when that person lived in your house. **Court records** may also prove useful in learning more about the family that resided in your home. You can find these records for Delaware County up to 1960 at Carnegie Library or some may also be available through our [Digital Resource Library](#). You can also find a [probate index](#) on our website. The County Histories in our collection found via the Muncie Public Library [catalog](#) and [online](#) are good for finding biographical information about pioneers and early residents that may have lived in your home.

## Photographs

One of the biggest things asked with regard to house history is if we have any historical photographs of the house in question. This may require some deep digging on the part of the researcher, especially if the house didn't belong to someone of repute or has a lot of historicity attached to it. Some of the resources already mentioned like city directories, newspapers, and county histories may have an image of the house.

Muncie Public Library has a historic postcard collection at Carnegie Library that does include some residences, street scenes, and aerial views of Muncie, Indiana. However, your best bet probably would be in a private collection. The Facebook group [Lost Muncie](#) is an archived page that was once dedicated to the discussion of Muncie's past. The archived page is searchable, and you may find a historic photo of your house.

If you are looking for photographs of past residents, a good resource for this is school yearbooks available here at Carnegie Library. [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) as well as [AncestryLibrary.com](https://www.ancestrylibrary.com) may also have a collection of school yearbooks online. Depending on how influential or respected that family/person was, you may find a sketched portrait of the person or an image of the home in the County histories available at Carnegie Library or [online](#).

Three great resources for photographs of both houses and people are Ball State University's [Digital Media Repository](#), [Minnetrista Heritage Collection](#), and the [Delaware County Historical Society](#)'s collection.

## Additional Resources

We have a couple of tutorials that may help you in your house history research. For the Digital Resource Library, we have created a [tutorial](#) to help you use and navigate this resource. Also, we have a [Genealogy Basics at Home](#) tutorial that will help you learn more about the families that lived in your home using genealogy research methods. Last, the Sanborn Maps can be rather difficult to navigate, so check out this [instructional video](#) on how to use them for your research.