

# Researching Your Winnetka Property



WHS Photograph Collection, 1991.3099 - 411 Linden Street, Winnetka

Compiled by the  
Winnetka Historical Society  
Museum & Headquarters  
411 Linden Street  
Winnetka, IL 60093  
(847) 446-0001



# Step 1: Starting

Gather all the materials you already have about your house in a folder.

- Real estate listing from when you purchased
- Building plans from any era
- Any information on renovations
- Blueprints
- Current & historic photos
- Information about previous owners

What if I don't have any of these things? - SKIP  
(This is probably why you started this process!)

# Step 2: the House

Determine the style of your house.

- Examine the exterior features of your home.
- Style can help you to arrive at an approximate date of construction.
- Check out one of these books from the library, or by the Winnetka Historical Society Reference Room to help you determine which style is closest.
- If your home is newer, it's possible the style of your home is a mixed or eclectic style.
- TIP: Dates for styles are usually based on their popularity on the East Coast. Sometimes, the style didn't become popular in the Midwest until a few years later.



American Foursquare, 1895-1920



Tudor Revival, 1900-1940

## Resources for identifying architecture styles:

*A Field Guide to American Houses*  
McAlester, Virginia, and A L. McAlester.  
New York: Knopf, 1984  
\*available at WHS

*American Houses: a field guide to the architecture of the home*  
Foster, Gerald L.  
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.  
\*available at WPL, 728.37 FOS

*Identifying American Architecture: a pictorial guide to styles and terms, 1600-1945*  
Blumenson, John J.-G.  
AASLH: 1989.  
\*available at WHS

*What Style Is It? : a guide to American architecture*  
Poppeliers, John C., and S A. Chambers.  
New York: John Wiley, 2003.  
\*available at WHS  
\*available at WPL, 720.973 POP

*Winnetka Architecture: Where Past is Present: A Guide to Timeless Styles*  
Benjamin, Susan  
Winnetka Historical Society: 1990.  
\*available at WHS  
\*available at WPL, 720.9773 WIN

# Step 3: Winnetka Historical Society

## Check the Winnetka Historical Society Architectural Survey.

The Winnetka Historical Society is currently conducting an architectural survey of the existing building stock of the Village of Winnetka. As of May 2014, about half of the Village has been surveyed. If your house has been surveyed, we have already pulled your building permit and may have the permit information already on file for you.

## Check your “House File” at the Museum.



WHS House Files may contain old real estate listings, newspaper clippings, copies of the historic architecture surveys from the 1976 survey of Illinois and the 1989 survey of Winnetka, and some photographs. House files range in the amount of information they contain.

## Check the Winnetka Historical Society museum collections database.

WHS has an extensive, 4,000+ photograph collection containing historic photographs of people, places, and events related to the history of the Village, as well as artifacts and archives. A staff member will search the database for items that may be related to your property or its previous owners.

## Locate your property in the Sanborn Map.

The museum has both digital copies in black and white and a physical, color book of Sandborn Fire Insurance Map, originally conducted in 1938 and updated in the 1950s.

Sandborn maps were designed to assist fire insurance agents in determining the degree of hazard associated with a particular property and therefore show the size, shape, and construction of dwellings, commercial buildings, and factories as well as fire walls, locations of windows and doors, sprinkler systems, and types of roofs. The maps also indicate widths and names of streets, property boundaries, building use, and house and block numbers. They show the locations of water mains, giving their dimensions, and of fire alarm boxes and hydrants.



## Find your property in Sidwell Maps.

Get a copy (digital or physical) of Sidwell Maps or subdivision maps of your Winnetka property, generated in 2008.

## See aerial photographs, historic plats, blueprints, and maps.

Look through oversized aerial photographs from the 1950s, historic maps of the village, and some blueprints of homes & buildings.

Visit the Winnetka Historical Society Museum at 411 Linden Street during open hours Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday from 1-4pm or Monday-Friday 8am-4pm by appointment.  
<http://www.winnetkahistory.org> | [whsinfo@winnetkahistory.org](mailto:whsinfo@winnetkahistory.org) | 847-446-0001

# Step 4: Village of Winnetka

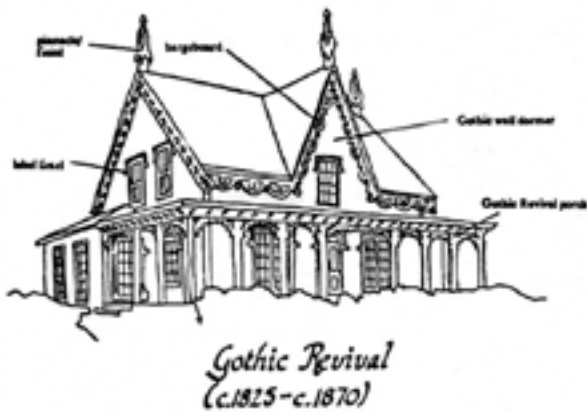
## Check your “House File” at the Village.

Your Village House File may contain permit applications, water and sewer hook up information dating back to 1893, and any other community related matters with your house, such as correspondence between homeowners and the Village.

## Check out the Village GIS website.

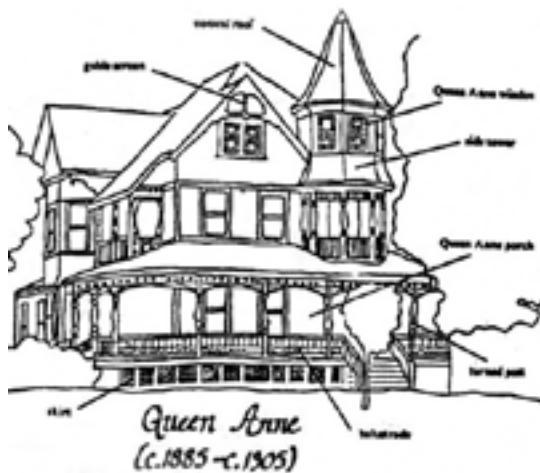
Through its involvement with the GIS Consortium, the Village offers access to interactive maps through its website. Residents may use this tool to find information regarding individual properties, such as zoning classification, property identification numbers, or even aerial photographs. A benchmark map of the Village is also available.

The Community Development Department is located on the first floor of Village Hall and is open weekdays from 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. 510 Green Bay Road, First Floor, 847-716-3576



**TIP:** *If you cannot locate your permit...*

It may have been lost to the ages. Village files have been occasionally purged over the years with some collateral damage. But, there is hope! Keep reading through the rest of this booklet for information on other resources you can use to piece together the building date, builder, architect, and first owner of your home.



# Step 5: Cook County Recorder of Deeds

## Find the Chain of Ownership for your property.

If you haven't located a complete chain of ownership for your property through the Village or WHS, you may be able to find that information through the Cook County Recorder of Deeds Office in Downtown Chicago.

You can find any document recorded after October 1, 1985 by online search here:  
<http://cookrecorder.com/search-our-records/>

All documents dated before October 1, 1985 were recorded in tract books, which list areas by subdivision. Those records are only available in print only.

To access print tract records, you will need your house's 14-digit property identification number (PIN) listed on your Real Estate Tax Bill to the Recorder of Deeds Downtown Office. If you do not know your PIN number, you can get it from the County Clerk, located in the same building as the Recorder of Deeds, or from the Village of Winnetka.

You will also need the legal description of your property (it's on your purchase documents, the plat of survey, or can be obtained from the Cook County Treasurer's Office, Rm 112 in the County Building.)

Once you have them ready, take you PIN and legal description of your property to the Basement - Tract Department - Cook County Recorder of Deeds, County Building, 118 N Clark St. (312) 603-5050.

Use the Index Books located on the tops of the cabinets to find information about your property. The index is arranged by township and range number. You'll see a section number, and there you can find your subdivision name. This will refer you to number of the tract book you need.

Index pages in each tract book will refer you to your subdivision. Then, within the subdivision, look for the block and lot you are researching. Handwriting will vary and will not always give you an obvious description. Refer to the "Conducting a Tract Search" document provided by the Tract Department or ask the front desk if you need some help with deciphering the text.

These books may provide great clues, so be sure to photograph or copy down the tract numbers of any documents you may want to follow up on.

If you want to see the complete transaction document for any line in the tract book, copy down the tract page numbers and take them to the room next door where you can fill out a form to view the microfilm copy of the document. The microfilm will contain more details of the legal transaction, which may give you another trail of clues to follow up on through other sources.

# Step 6: Construction & Architects

## Local Research, Winnetka Talk:

If you have found the date of construction or sale of your home, you may be able to find a construction report or real estate report in the *Winnetka Talk* daily newspaper. In order for this search to be worth the time, a relatively certain circa-date is necessary.

The *Winnetka Talk* is available:

- Winnetka Public Library - microfilm dating back to 1917
- Winnetka Historical Society - hard copy with *Winnetka Weekly Talk* issues dating from 1913-1916 and *Winnetka Talk* 1917-present

## Chicago Research, Chicago History Museum:

If your permit indicated an architect, you can look his or her name up in the catalogue at the Chicago History Museum Reference Room, located at the Museum.

<http://libguides.chicagohistory.org/research>

While limited to Chicago's listings, the *American Contractor* has been indexed by the Chicago History Museum and is available here:

<http://www.chsmedia.org/househistory/1898-1912permits/search.asp>

With the information of what other buildings the architect designed, you may be able to find a significant property that is a Chicago Landmark, has a National Register Nomination, or National Historic Landmark, which would provide a detailed description of your architect and his or her body of work.

For more, search CHM reference periodicals in hard copy at the CHM Reference Room:

- American Contractor qTH1.A5
- The Economist qHG1.E3
- Real Estate and Building Journal HD1361.R43 OVERSIZE
- Inland Architect NA722. i5a MICROFILM
- Inter Ocean newspaper MICROFILM

## Chicago Research, Ryerson & Burnham Library, Art Institute of Chicago

Search their resources online here:

<http://www.artic.edu/research>

Find detailed information on their house history resources here:

<http://www.artic.edu/research/house-history-research>

At the library, you can find the Burnham Index, an index to old journals that would review the work of the better-known architects, oral histories, and the librarians, who are a very valuable resource.

## Online Research:

*The Economist* is fully archived and available online through Gale. You can sign up for a free trial here: <http://gdc.gale.com/products/the-economist-historical-archive-1843-2007/>, can purchase access directly from The Economist, or visit a Chicago Public Library Branch to use this valuable resource for free to find information on lesser known architects.

Google - obvious, but you never know what you can come up with via a simple search.

The American Institute of Architects (AIA) Historical Directory of American Architects has information on architects through 1978 along with research guides and tips. <http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki>

# Step 6: Research Property Owners



231 Church Street,  
Winnetka



948 Hubbard Street,  
Winnetka



1070 Westmoor, Winnetka



1175 Whitebridge Hill,  
Winnetka

## Local Research: Highland Park Library

The Highland Park Library has issues from published Feb 1899 - Nov 1904 of *Sheridan Road*, an historic North Shore society publication - unrelated to the modern-day *Sheridan Road Magazine* - via microfilm. Each issue featured a Winnetka section of society news, which could contain information about events and visitors who stayed at your home. Visit the reference desk and they will direct you to the drawers and electronic microfilm readers, which will allow you to save directly to a Google Drive or USB drive.

## Local Research: Winnetka Historical Society

Similarly, *The Messenger*, a community-based church newsletter that was published 1896-1915 is also available at the Winnetka Historical Society. Sometimes construction reports were printed here as well.

People reference files contain information on residents and families who lived in Winnetka.

The museum collection database may also be of use once you have more information on names or families.

## Search for business owners or prominent citizens who worked in the city:

- the Chicago History Museum catalogue
- Book of Chicagoans
- Who's Who in Chicago
- History of Chicago
- History of Cook County Illinois
- Winnetka Public Library catalog
- Winnetka Historical Society Reference Library

## Online Research:

Ancestry.com Library Edition is available for free use at the Winnetka Public Library and Winnetka Historical Society. Find Census data, war service cards, photos and documents added by users, and more.

## Local Residents:

Talk to your neighbors, long-time residents of the Village, but remember to be critical of every source, including your paper sources, and always try to back up what you find either from multiple oral sources, or a combination of oral and traditional paper sources.

# House Research Worksheet

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates, approximate:

1. Current Property Owner: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Previous Property Owners: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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3. Property Identification Number (P.I.N.) \_\_\_\_\_

*on your tax bill or can be requested from Community Development, Village Hall*

4. Date of Construction, current home: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Demolition (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Construction, demolished home: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Architectural Style: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Architect: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Builder: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Designer: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Alterations (architects, builders, contractors, description of work done)

Alterations Dates

Exterior: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Interior: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Documentation Checklist

- Original building permit
- Subsequent renovations / alterations permits
- Demolition permit
- Historic Architectural Impact Study
- Original plans
- Renovations plans
- Current photographs
  - Exterior
  - Interior
- Historic photographs
- Historic real estate listings
- WHS “house file” or structure file
- Tax information via the Cook County Assessor’s Office website
- Deeds via the Cook County Recorder of Deeds
- Sandborn fire insurance map
- Water & Electric hook-up information
- Newspaper articles
- Chain of Property Ownership



This resource booklet was compiled by Siera Heavner, curator at the Winnetka Historical Society, in May 2014. The content relies heavily on the work from the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development “Your House a History: A Step-by-Step Guide to Researching Your Property” publication developed by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks. Thanks also to the Winnetka Landmark Preservation Commission, and WHS Executive Director Patti Van Cleave.