

## HOW OLD IS MY HOUSE?

### A GUIDE TO RESEARCHING THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE OR BUILDING USING SOURCES AT WELLINGTON COUNTY MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

Determining the history of a house or any building is a challenging task. Assessment rolls and lands abstracts may provide you with sufficient information to help you approximate the date of construction. The following guidelines are designed to give researchers some helpful hints in answering the questions – How Old Is My House?

STEP 1: Decide how much information you want to gather eg. enough to determine construction date, or enough to write a houselog.

STEP 2: Determine the legal land description for your property (eg. street and lot number or Concession and lot number – your Tax Assessment bill will give you this information).

STEP 3: Determine where the historical records are kept (call local archives, libraries, registry offices, municipal offices).

STEP 4: Search your house for physical evidence of its history (look for a datestone and determine its architectural style so you can limit research to probable time period).

STEP 5: Research the following records available at the Wellington County Museum and Archives.

- **Land Abstracts:** Land abstracts detail transactions involving ownership including names of parties, dates of transactions, and types of transactions such as sales and mortgages. Large mortgages sometimes provide funds for construction. Deeds often cite occupation of purchaser. Land Abstracts and early deeds are copied from originals at local Registry Offices.
- **Assessment Rolls:** When viewed over several years they record increases in taxable value of property, thereby giving clues to approximate date.
- **Census Returns:** Returns for 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, and 1891 and 1901 are available, and record residents, age, occupation, religion, origin. Returns for 1851, 1861, 1891 and 1901 list type of dwelling.
- **Directories and Gazetteers:** These books record names and occupations of household heads, and advertisements for local businesses.
- **Newspapers:** Newspapers often recorded houses under construction, as did some year end editions. Researchers should also check newspapers for time period just before a sale has been registered since many newspapers contain sale notices with house descriptions.
- **Personal Papers:** Letters, diaries, business records, etc. of former owners or neighbours may refer to your house.
- **Pictures:** Photographs, paintings and prints of your neighbourhood may contain a view of your house.

- **Fire Insurance Plans:** The Archivist holds a microfiche copy of a few fire insurance plans for Wellington County communities. They take the form of street plans showing building shapes and locations.
- **Maps and Atlases:** Ownership maps are especially useful as they often indicate building locations.
- **Couling Collection:** The Gordon Couling Collection consists of architectural inventories, photographs and slides of significant architectural buildings in Guelph and Wellington County.
- **Building Plans:** Very few building plans survive but some historic books on architecture or building construction include house plans. The Wellington County Museum and Archives holds the following books:

The Domestic Planner and Sanitary Architect. London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1891.

- floor plans, advice on construction styles and techniques (A1976.136.1)

Shearer, Herbert. Farm Buildings With Plans and Descriptions. Chicago: Frederick J. Drake and Co., 1917.

- floor plans and suggestions on design and construction of farm houses and farm buildings (A1987.33)

Kenyon Take Down Houses Catalogue No. 51. Wisconsin: R. L. Kenyon Co., 1912

- catalogue and price list for ready-to-assemble camp/tent houses (A1976.84.161)

The Modern System of Frame Construction. Toronto: The Harris Wood Products Co., circa 1950

- catalogue of factory produced, ready-to-assemble frame houses (A1976.84.165)

Humphreys, Barbara. The Buildings of Canada. Montreal: Meredith Sykes, 1980.

- illustrated guide to pre-20<sup>th</sup> Century architectural styles (A1993.103)

Gardner, E. C. Homes and How to Make Them. Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1875

- illustrated guide to home planning and construction (A1977.12.11)

Scott, Frank. Beautiful Homes – The Art of Beautifying Suburban Home Grounds of Small Extent. New York: John Balden Co., 1886.

- architectural styles, floor plans (A1987.33 and A1977.12.25)

How to Build Cabins, Lodges, Bungalows. New York: Popular Science Publishing Co., 1934.

- suggestions on how to construct log cabins and bungalows (A1977.44.12)

Holly, H. Hudson. Modern Dwellings In Town and Country: Adapted to American Wants and Climate With a Treatise on Furniture and Decorations. New York: Harper and Bros., 1878.

- illustrated guide to home design (A1977.12.26)

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