

TIPS FOR RESEARCHING THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE

A SAMPLING OF RESOURCES IN THE Buncombe County Special Collections

Here are some of our favorite resources for uncovering the history of your home:

Special Collections Database

Home page: specialcollections.buncombecounty.org

Database search: <https://7039.sydneyplus.com/archive/final/Portal.aspx>

Our online database includes photographs, newspaper articles, architectural drawings, maps, letters and manuscript collections. To see if the house you are looking for is in our database, use the tab “Browse Locations.” Type the name of your street name or neighborhood into the search bar, and the results will show all of the addresses we have entered for that street. Click on a term to pull up the records tagged with that location.

Asheville City Directories: 1883-Present

The city directories are a great way to begin learning the history of your house. The directories include listings by occupant name, street name, and business types. You can often learn the general time a house was built by finding when the address first appears in the street index. (One caution is that early house address numbers changed as new houses were built, so your house may appear with a different address than its current address. This is especially true before 1930.) The name index often lists occupation and the name of a spouse. You can use the names to search deeds, tax records, etc. Print copies are available at Buncombe County Special Collections (BCSC) in the lower level of Pack Memorial Library.

Asheville City directories can be found online at DigitalNC, Archive.org and other providers.

Buncombe County Register of Deeds

You can search for deeds at the Buncombe County Register of Deeds office or online at www.buncombecounty.org/rod. About halfway down the home page, click on the “Online Record Lookup” box. Once you familiarize yourself with the services offered on the website, you can use the “Quick Name Search.” If you’re the current owner of the house, you were the buyer or “grantee” in the last sale. Enter your name in the search engine to view a digital image of the deed you signed with the person(s) who sold you the house—in legal terminology, the “grantor.” Now you can drill down into the history of your house. By entering the name of your grantor in the search engine, you can find the deed that was drawn up when your house was sold one transaction earlier. By repeating this process, you can trace ownership, deed by deed, all the way back to the time when your house was built.

Architectural Drawings:

BCSC also has a large collection of architectural drawings. Most of the work is by the architect Richard Sharp Smith, as well as by the firm and architects of Six Associates, Inc. The addresses for the majority of these drawings are not known, but many are listed by the owner/builder's name and sometimes a street name will be given. Once you know the person who built the house you can use the BCSC database to do a name search.

Obituaries:

Obituaries are one of the best sources of information in old newspapers. BCSC has indexes to Buncombe County deaths and also access to Buncombe County death certificates through the Register of Deeds office. These sources give you the date of death, which you can use to find obituaries at Newspapers.com or in the microfilm copies of the *Asheville Times* and the *Asheville Citizen*. Your research may lead you to former residents of your house or their descendants who may have memories and photos to share.

Newspapers.com

[Newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com) is also available at BCSC. It has great keyword search capabilities and can be used to find property purchases, news about a specific home or neighborhood, announcements of architects or construction contracts, and news of social gatherings.

Tax Records:

The Buncombe County Tax Department maintains a link to tax records at <http://www.buncombetax.org/>. Most tax records include an archive card which often gives date of construction and a footprint of the original building.

Books and Publications:

Asheville's Historic Montford District. This book has photographs and histories of many Montford houses. We have a reference copy at BCSC, and there are also circulating copies in our library system.

Another aid for Montford research is the *Historic Montford Neighborhood: Architectural Guide* (Montford Resource Center, 2000), cataloged at BCSC as MAP401.2. This guide takes you street-by-street through the Montford Historic District with information on the original owner, date of construction, and architectural features of selected houses.

Cabins and Castles: The History and Architecture of Buncombe County, North Carolina
This is another great resource for architectural histories available at BCSC and in circulation.

Asheville's Historic Architecture by Richard Hansley.

Other Resources:

UNC Asheville's Ramsey Library

The Special Collections and University Archives at the D. H. Ramsey Library of UNC Asheville offer still more resources. The rich website at www.toto.lib.unca.edu provides online access to books, pamphlets, manuscripts, photographs, oral histories, and a wealth of other material.

The oral histories in the Ramsey Library are a strong suit. Extensive photographic archives, including the E. M. Ball Collection, are yet another strength of the Ramsey Library's holdings. Western North Carolina Heritage, a collaborative effort of UNCA and several other institutions, offers a "collection of digital collections" featuring 150,000 photographs, 5,000 of them online. Visit the WNC Heritage website cdm15733.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm enter "Montford" in the search engine, and stand back. NOTE: As of May 2022, UNCA is in the process of migrating collections from the WNC Heritage portal to a new site in collaboration with Western Carolina University, <https://southernappalachiandigitalcollections.org>.

The Preservation Society

The Preservation Society of Asheville and Buncombe County maintains a website at www.psabc.org that describes the society's valuable work. It provides links to other preservation websites and to articles that have appeared in the newsletter *Pebbledash*. BCSC has a collection of these newsletters which includes some indexing to articles about specific houses.

Riverside Cemetery

Some of the people who've lived in your house may well be slumbering in Riverside, and the search engine on the website will help you find them. www.cityofasheville.github.io/riversidecemetery/Main/index.html.

Sanborn Maps:

<http://www.nclive.org/>

Sign in with your Buncombe County Library card number. Scroll down and click on heading "Genealogy and Historical Maps" then choose "Sanborn Maps North Carolina" to begin your search. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps allow you to see the footprint of your house and a bird's-eye view of the other structures on your street. They were filmed periodically from 1885 until 1950.

Bird's Eye Panorama Maps:

Panoramic maps, popular throughout the nation during the late 1800s and early 1900s, may offer you an artist's sketch of your house—another bird's-eye view. The American Memory website of the Library of Congress features panoramic maps of Asheville drawn in 1891 and 1912. You can find them by going to <https://www.loc.gov/collection/panoramic-maps/about-this-collection/> and browsing by Geographic Location. Clicking on one of the maps lets you move around and zoom in on your house. These maps are also available at BCSC as MAP202 (1891) and MAP 208 (1912.)

DID YOU FIND ANYTHING? PLEASE LET US KNOW!

We would greatly appreciate it if you'd share what you learn so that we can add it to our collection. Come by and see us in the Buncombe County Special Collections in the lower level of Pack Library; hours are Tuesday through Friday 10AM – 6PM and Saturday, 10AM – 5PM. Or contact us at packnc@buncombecounty.org or 828-250-4740.