

A Resident's Guide to Researching Historic Property

*Toolkit for Curious Citizens
of the Sunshine City, St. Petersburg*



View from the Coliseum, c 1920

photo by
Judy

How to Use this Guide

This guide is designed to help you better understand the origins and history of your home or place of business. Whether it is located within one of our districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places or St. Petersburg Register of Historic Places, is an individual landmark, or is simply a space that you love, uncovering the details of a building’s evolution between *then* and *now* can be a rewarding exercise and might even reveal some remarkable connections to the city’s social and developmental past.

The following three sections will help you appreciate your building’s history and context by *Determining Construction Date*, *Learning about Previous Owners*, and *Discovering the History of Your Neighborhood*. Beginning on page 6, sources available from the City of St. Petersburg, Pinellas County, and other organizations will be explained. The *Log* on the back cover of this booklet will help you keep track of the information you collect. Every building tells a piece of the Sunshine City’s rich and complex story, and we thank you for contributing to a greater understanding of our built environment.

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This document was prepared by the City of St. Petersburg’s
Urban Design and Historic Preservation Division
If you have any comments or questions, please contact us at:
727.892.5451, or hispres@stpete.org

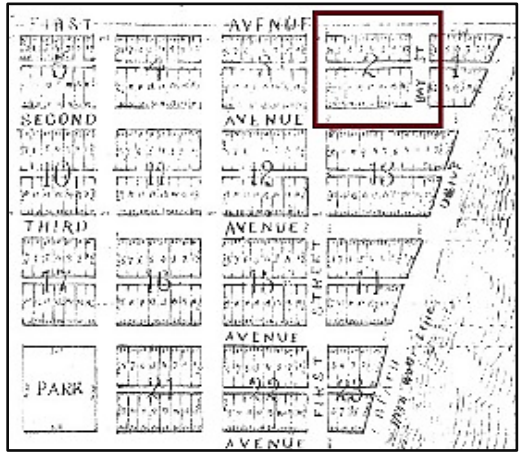
Determining Construction Date

Identifying the year that your home was built is often the first step in understanding its past. There are several ways to pinpoint and verify this date. Records can sometimes be ambiguous or provide conflicting information, so cross-referencing multiple sources will result in the most accurate information. For the purposes of this booklet, the c. 1905 Blocker House, located at 145 Fourth Avenue Northeast, is used as an example.

»» **Neighborhood characteristics** such as street patterns, the relationship of buildings to one another, and the mixture of building styles and types can both help tie your building to a historical period and highlight certain historical contexts that surrounded its construction. Some St. Petersburg neighborhoods such as Roser Park, for example, were carefully planned and marketed to potential Northern transplants, whereas sections of downtown developed more organically and featured a mixture of commercial, single family houses, and small apartment buildings exhibiting varying styles. Buildings in planned neighborhoods were generally constructed within a shorter time span.

Landscape elements such as street-facing driveways were confined to wealthy homes during the 1920s. As the twentieth century progressed and more Americans came to own cars, developers catered less to the pedestrian and more to the automobile. Midcentury neighborhoods tend to have larger building setbacks, wider parcels, and driveways

that can be accessed from the street, instead of the more traditional alley garages that characterize earlier developments.



1895 Plat Map showing the vicinity of the Blocker House, 145 Fourth Avenue Northeast as a neatly-gridded section of the early downtown neighborhood with small blocks and narrow parcels. Note that the Avenue numbering has since changed. In this case, Williams Park, at lower left, serves as a good reference point to confirm the block's location.

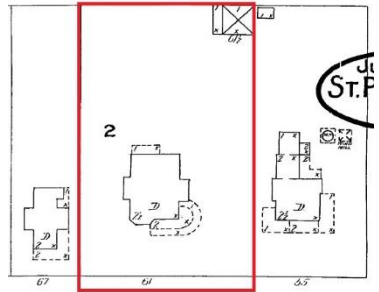
»»» **Plat Maps** depict the division of land into parcels for development. They can reveal original street names and layouts, as well as the dates and names of developers involved with neighborhoods' establishment. The City maintains records of street names that have changed over the years, and Staff can help you with questions about the original address of your property.

»»» **The Sanborn Map Company** created incredibly precise and detailed scaled maps of over 12,000 communities in the United States between 1867 and the late twentieth century. Created for the purpose of underwriting fire insurance, the maps depict building footprints and landscape features, construction materials, and use. Though published only sporadically and covering only relatively densely-populated neighborhoods, when several are available they can often give insight into changes made to buildings and neighborhoods over time.

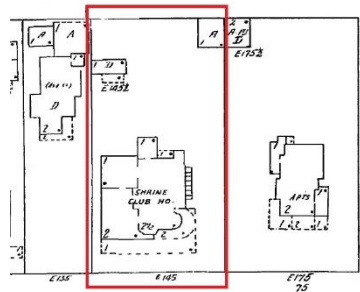
»»» **The City of St. Petersburg's Property Cards** for each property within the city were updated from 1922 through 1987. These cards recorded permits for construction, often identifying the architect, as well as for additions, alterations, electrical and plumbing work, and demolitions. Information on how to access them can be found in the City Resources section.

»»» Details such as the **Architectural Style and Materials** of your building can help you narrow down the construction date to a range of years, which can aid in ruling out potentially erroneous dates in City or County records. Resources helpful in connecting features of your home to a period of history can be found in the Other Useful Sources section.

»»» Development trends in St. Petersburg have always been big news, and **Newspaper Archives** can sometimes provide information on the issuance of permits, plans for new neighborhoods, and perhaps even the architect of your home. 1920s and 1930s editions often reference



Sanborn Maps of the Blocker House in 1908 (above) and 1956 (below), depicting western addition and adaptive reuse of residence as a Shriners' Club



visitors and winter residents, which can be helpful in narrowing a construction date range.

»» **Historical photographs** are another way to determine that a building had been constructed by a certain date or earlier, and can also give you clues about dates of alterations or additions. Some good sources for such photos are listed in the Local & State Photo Archives section.

»» **The Pinellas County Property Appraiser's Office Website** hosts a fully searchable database that includes each parcel's legal description, the original plat book and page describing the land's subdivision, recent sales, and construction date. This date can be somewhat unreliable for buildings dating to 1925 or earlier, so be sure to cross reference!



The Blocker House at 145 Fourth Ave. NE, Constructed in 1905 and photographed shortly thereafter

Learning about Previous Occupants

Getting to know the stories of the individuals who have dwelt in, worked in, and shaped the city's buildings creates connections between the past and present that are often delightfully unexpected. Take your research beyond previous occupants' names and dates to document occupations, travels, and interests; you might find you have something in common!

»» Talking to **neighbors and former residents** might yield a surprising amount of information. Names and dates of ownership, anecdotes about previous occupants, and even historic photos have been revealed through something as casual as a friendly conversation.

»» **Polk's City Directories** were published annually beginning in 1912 and can be used to confirm the existence and residents of historic properties. It

TIMES, TOBES AND ACCESSORIES		Ramm's Garage Cor. 2nd and St. S and 4th Ave. S Always Open Phone 39	
78 Fourth Ave N E ST PETERSBURG Fourth Ave S		314	Merlin E. North
116	E S Wilson	320	Harry Crenady
"	Charles Pelton	"	Peter Prochaska jr
118	Frank Fry	326	Vacant
122	Mrs W A Harp	328	Vacant
126	Mrs M E Anderson	338	Vacant
135	T D Snyder	344	Vacant
140	Mrs F Smith	350	Geo Franck
145	A T Blocker	350	Geo Franck
"	G S Gandy	411	Vacant
146	H W Bryan	411b	G P Emlicott
150	Davidson Apts	418	A L Gandy
156	Mrs M E McCallan	421	Mrs Bertha Carroll
175	T W Weston	425	C W Hollis
188	G W Kaeriem	426	Vacant
205	Mrs A N Man	435	H W Olcott
215	Vacant	438	Wood Acres

Entry for the Blocker House in 1920 Polk's City Directory. City Directories can identify neighboring families, boarders, and occupants' professions as well as owners' names.

should be noted, however, that these directories can sometimes be misleading because of address changes or the demolition or relocation of earlier buildings at an address. These directories can be accessed at the St. Petersburg Main Library (3745 Ninth Ave. N.) or the St. Petersburg Museum of History (335 Second Ave. N.E.).

»» If a former resident or especially knowledgeable neighbor is willing to help you with your research in a more extensive and formal manner, consider sitting down to record an **oral history**. By coming prepared with a few targeted questions about your home and its occupants, but also letting the conversation meander, you might be surprised about the depth of information you can collect.

»» Once you have identified a previous owner and pinpointed the year that he or she died, a **Death Certificate** can be ordered from the Florida Department of Health for a small fee. The cause of death will be withheld for deaths that have occurred within the last 50 years.

»» **Newspapers** can contain references to everything from birthday parties to career achievements. A name search through the *Evening Independent* and *St. Petersburg Times* sections of the Google News Archives might reveal new details or help frame other pieces of evidence. **Obituaries**, which can be found by searching newspaper archives by name or date, may provide biographical information such as the names of family members and business partners, employment history, and places of residence.

»» **Historic deeds** are filed by name but can give fantastic insight into the length of time that a family owned a property, cost, and buildings that were located on the property.

A. T. (BERT) BLOCKER
CANDIDATE For COUNTY TREASURER



In announcing my candidacy for this important office I would say to those who do not know me, that I have been a resident of this state since 1885, over twenty-nine years, and a resident of what is now Pinellas County for more than sixteen years.

During all of that time which I have been here I have, until quite recently been in business in St. Petersburg, and doing business with friends and acquaintances all over this section.

I have always been a Progressive Democrat, and while in no sense would I care to be considered a "politician," I have served my community in many and various capacities and during my tenure of office in St. Petersburg have always worked hard for that which I believed to be best for all parties concerned. My record here is one of which I am thoroughly satisfied.

In asking your support for the office I desire, I assure you that my qualifications are all that could be desired, and if elected, I shall devote my entire time and attention to the duties of the office, and endeavor to serve my county and its people in a manner which will be thoroughly satisfactory.

I WISH FURTHER TO IMPRESS UPON ALL THAT I AM NOT A CANDIDATE OF ANY FACTION, MAN, OR SET OF MEN OF ANY POLITICAL FAITH. IF ELECTED MY ONLY PLEDGE IS TO SERVE THE PEOPLE OF PINELLAS COUNTY IN THE BEST WAY POSSIBLE FOR THE GOOD OF ALL.

Soliciting your hearty support, in return for which I would give you faithful and efficient service at all times, I am,
Yours to command,
A. T. (BERT) BLOCKER

St. Petersburg Times
January 2, 1914

City of St. Petersburg Resources

»» The City of St. Petersburg maintains an interactive **Historic Preservation Map** that allows users to search for the historic landmark status of a property, view district boundaries, and see the locations of all Nationally and Locally designated buildings and districts, our African American Heritage Trails, and historic features such as brick streets, hex block sidewalks, and iconic signage. The map can be accessed through the “Historic Research Library” section of www.stpete.org/history.

»» As a Certified Local Government, St. Petersburg maintains copies of **Florida Master Site File (FMSF) forms** for properties located within its boundaries. The FMSF is the State of Florida’s official inventory of historical and cultural resources, including archaeological sites as well as historical buildings, structures, cemeteries, bridges, districts, and landscape features. It is an active inventory of resources over 50 years old, without regard to historical significance. FMSF forms have been completed for over 7,500 resources in St. Petersburg.

Historical buildings, structures, and sites with FMSF forms are shown in a layer on St. Petersburg’s Historic Preservation Map. If you would like a copy of an FMSF form, contact us at 727.892.5451 or hispres@stpete.org with the address or FMSF number.

»» Historical **Property Cards** contain information about zoning approvals and construction permits from the City’s origins to 1988. They often reveal owners, the name of contractors and even architects, and the dates of construction, alteration, and changes of use. To search for a property card by address, visit the *Building and Permitting* page at https://www.stpete.org/construction_services_and_permitting/property_cards.php, and click *View Historical Property Cards (Older than 1988)*. Plans from 1956 and later referenced in the Property Cards may be available from the Construction Services Department for a fee.

Use caution when determining construction dates from historical property cards, especially for buildings built prior to 1920 and when the card is noted to be a copy at the upper left, as with the card pictured here. Despite some inaccuracies, Property Cards are overall a fantastic portrayal of a building’s evolution throughout the years.

Copy SUBDIVISION REVISED MAP		LOT 13 & 14 W 30'		BLOCK 2	
BUILDING		ELECTRICAL		PLUMBING	
Location: 145 - 1th Ave. N.E. Shrine Club 2 F & F Cottage & 2 sheds #35939 - 6/4/36 - \$500 Int. Shrine Club - Reroof bldg. #42907 - 6/20/39 - Shrine Club (Boyette & Co.) - Reroof #200 #22022 - 6/21/26 - \$6000 Shrine Club - 1 story frame addn and alterations #63861 - 7/17/47 - \$1000 Owner: International Club Add storage room at N.W. Cor. of present bldg. (20' x 24') #68435 - 5/10/48 - \$50 Owner: International Club - Heater room (Type D) B of A - 2/9/51 - Denied to erect addition to bldg. #5788A-F - 5/5/54 - \$350 Owner: International Club - Fire escape - Downing's Forge, Contr.		#2082A - 11/13/41 - Shrine Club Hayes - Temp. motor inst. #2521A - 1/9/42 - 4 fan motors OK 1/20/42 #2957A - 4/23/42 - Shrine Club Trimble - General Repairs OK 4/23/42 #3684 - 6/28/43 - Shrine Club Brinson - Dishwasher		#21338 -21343 - 21345 - 6/28/43 Shrine Club - Savery-Shainline - Dishwasher #3383 - 5/5/48 - International Club E. R. Lorimer - GWH #20653 - 4/13/42 - Shrine Club Shainline - 2c 1-L OK 4/16/42 #2981E - 4/30/57 - International Club Spindler Plbg. - repipe sink & dish- washer	
(over)		OVER		OVER	
		INSTALLATION		GAS	
		#7812C - 1/21/64 - International C. St. Pete Htg. - 1-space heater, Janitrol unit htr.		#1265 - 5/5/48 - International Club E. R. Lorimer - 1-w.heater #1611-A - 8/30/55 - Bryan Shainline - Remove 31 pp meters #2549C-5-25-60-International Club W. W. Waschter-replace coffee urn #2685C-6-10-60-International Club Seidenspinner-replace bake oven #5656C - 6/7/61 - International Club Macbeth Plbg. Co. - relocate meter	
		SEWER		SEPTIC TANK	
SIGNS		#P2828 - 12/19/67 - International Club - E.F.Martin - Disconnect sewer & water			

Property Card for the Blocker House. Although this record gives great detail about alterations and changes of use affecting the building beginning in the 1930s, earliest entry is dated 1936, over 20 years after the building's construction and following its adaptive reuse as a social club.

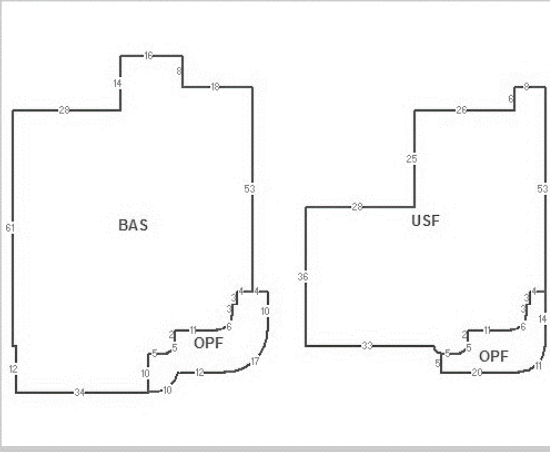
»»» **Historic Plats** of a building's neighborhoods can also be found in the *Building and Permitting* section of the City of St. Petersburg's website. Simply click Browse and expand the *Engineering* folder inside the *View Historical Property Cards* section. The Book and Page number that your property's plat is on will be noted in the Pinellas County Property Appraiser's Records. Since St. Petersburg's early development took place when Pinellas County was a portion of Hillsborough County, the first seven books are numbered H1 through H7. When Pinellas County formed in 1912, the new county began its own records with book 1.

»»» Since 1977, the City of St. Petersburg has been surveying older neighborhoods to identify and document historic and architecturally significant properties. These **Neighborhood Surveys**, as well as the **Cultural and Historic Resource Surveys** conducted by other organizations, can be found online at www.stpete.org/history.

»»» **City Staff** of the Urban Planning & Historic Preservation Division is constantly collecting research on the city's many resources. Contact Historic Preservationists Laura Duvekot (laura.duvekot@stpete.org or 727.892.5451) or Dr. Larry Frey (larry.frey@stpete.org or 727.892.5470) to discuss your research goals!

Pinellas County Records

>>> A searchable database of **Property Appraiser's records** can be accessed at www.pcpao.org. Select your search criterion (*Search by Name, Search by Address, or Search by Map*) from the menu at left.

[click here to hide] 2017 Building 1 Structural Elements Back to Top	
Site Address: 145 4TH AVE NE	
Quality: Fair	
Square Footage: 8112.00	
Foundation: Piers	
Floor System: Wood	
Exterior Wall: Frame Siding	
Roof Frame: Gable Or Hip	
Roof Cover: Shingle Composition	
Stories: 2	
Living units: 0	
Floor Finish: Carpet/Hardtile /Hardwood	
Interior Finish: Drywall/Plaster	
Fixtures: 16	
Year Built: 1915	
Effective Age: 50	
Heating: Central Duct	
Cooling: Cooling (Central)	

Property Appraiser's Records for the Blocker House.

Note that the Year Built noted in the above example is inconsistent with other information obtained through historic photographs, Polk's City Directories, and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Because of the loss of early paper records, this date is sometimes inaccurate, especially in the case of buildings constructed before 1925. Be sure to cross reference this date if it seems suspiciously early or late.

The *Effective Age* is not a measure of chronological age, and should not be mistaken for the actual age of a structure. It is a value determined by the Property Appraiser and based upon a calculation involving market value and depreciation. A building that has been well maintained will typically have an effective age that is less than its actual, or chronological, age.

>>> **Pinellas County Deeds** are kept at the County's Official Records Department, 315 Court Street, Clearwater, FL 33756. Recent deeds (filed 1970 and later) can be accessed at www.mypinellasclerk.org, but those filed prior to 1970 can be viewed on microfilm. Contact orcopy@co.pinellas.fl.us or 727.464.7000 for more information.

»» **Pinellas County Tax Rolls** dating from 1912 to 2004 are also available on microfilm from the Official Records Department; those dating from 2005 through the present can be found online.

Local & State Photo Archives

»» **The Burgert Brothers Photograph Collection** (digitalcollections.hcplc.org/cdm/) is part of the Hillsborough County Public Library's Digital Archive and contains hundreds of historic photographs.

»» **The St. Petersburg Museum of History Photograph Collection** (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/spmoh-archives/with/14513495325/>) allows access to a portion of the museum's extensive archives.

»» **Florida Memory** (www.floridamemory.com) serves as the State Archives of Florida. Their collections include a searchable image database of nearly 200,000 photographs and over 300,000 digitized documents from selected historical and genealogical collections.

Other Useful Sources

»» **Primary sources** are records that were created at the time under study. They include historic photographs, newspapers, the Property Cards discussed earlier, and any records that were kept as your building was built, occupied, and altered.

Historical editions of *The St. Petersburg Times* and *The Evening Independent* have been digitized and can be searched at www.news.google.com/newspapers.

If you know the name of an early occupant of your home and the year that they died, you might want to order a **death certificate**. Order death certificates at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/certificates/certificates/death/index.html>.

Sanborn Maps are available from several sources. The St. Petersburg Museum of History maintains a collection, as does the City of St. Petersburg. Sanborn Maps from 1904 through 1923 can also be accessed online through the University of Florida's Digital Collections, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/Uf00074228/00004/allvolumes?search=sanborn>.

You can create your own primary source by conducting an oral history with previous occupants. The **Oral History Association** (www.oralhistory.org) provides excellent tips for setting up and conducting an interview.

》》》 **Secondary sources** are created after an event has taken place, by a person who did not participate. The books that we generally think of as history books are secondary sources, as are, for example, the Staff Reports, FMSF forms, and other historic documentation that we put together on our historic resources. Contact the City's Historic Preservation Division or the St. Petersburg Library System (www.splibraries.org) for recommendations of secondary sources that may be useful in your research. Some of those that we find ourselves turning to the most include:

- Arsenault, Ray. *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996.
- Dunn, Hampton. *Yesterday's St. Petersburg*. Miami, FL: E. A. Seeman Pub., 1973.
- Fuller, Walter Pliny. *St. Petersburg and Its People*. St. Petersburg, FL: Great Outdoors Publishing Company, 1972.
- Grismer, Karl. *The History of St. Petersburg: Historical and Biographical*. St. Petersburg, FL: Tourist News Publishing Company, 1924.
- Marth, Dell. *St. Petersburg: Once Upon a Time, Memories of Places & People: 1890s to 1990s*. Branford, FL: Suwanee Rover Press, 1996.
- McAlester, Virginia Savage. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Co., 2015.
- Michaels, Will. *The Making of St. Petersburg*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012.

Property Information Log

Address: _____

Historic Address: _____

Many buildings have had several addresses over the years. Former addresses are sometimes shown on early Sanborn Maps, Property Cards, or St. Petersburg's Street Change Ordinance of January 9, 1928, which renamed and renumbered many streets to create consistency throughout the city.

House Name: _____

Houses are often named after the first occupants or historically significant owners.

Date of Construction: _____

When a building took several years to construct, its completion date or the date it was first occupied are generally used. When the exact year is not known, the prefix "circa," or "c." (from the Latin word for "about") is often added.

Architect: _____

The architect's name will not be available for all houses, but St. Petersburg has certainly had its share of noteworthy architects.

Contractor/Builder: _____

This information may be helpful in understanding the materials used to build your home, the reason it was built, or

Legal Description: _____

This will help start your research by providing subdivision information.

Parcel Identification Number (PIN): _____

Neighborhood/Subdivision: _____