

# MY HOME'S HISTORY

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A GUIDE TO RESEARCHING  
PROPERTY IN  
ST. PETERSBURG

# GENERAL GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

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## ADDRESS

### HISTORIC ADDRESS

Not all buildings in St. Petersburg have the same address as when originally built. Check early Sanborn Maps or the January 9, 1928 street change ordinance (#617a). This is particularly important when researching the city directories.

### HOUSE NAME

Houses are traditionally named after the first owner of the house or historically significant owners. Use the techniques and sources below to determine your home's original owner.

### YEAR AND COUNTY BUILT

Pinellas County was a subdivision of Hillsborough County when St. Petersburg was founded and would remain so until 1912. If your house was constructed prior to that year you may need to consult Hillsborough County's Official Records department in Tampa.

### ARCHITECT

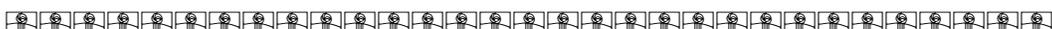
Not surprisingly with its tendency to real estate booms, St. Petersburg has had its share of noteworthy architects including Henry Taylor, Harry Cunningham, Archie Parrish, William Harvard, Edgar Ferdon, and others. While concentrating on major commercial or civic buildings, many would also design residences during economic downturns. The architect of record for older homes can often be found on the blueprints or the City's property card.

### LEGAL DESCRIPTION

This information will help start your research by providing subdivision information. You can gather it from a property survey or property appraiser's records.

### NEIGHBORHOOD

### PHOTOGRAPH (FROM WHAT ANGLE)



# SOURCES FOR PHYSICAL IDENTIFICATION

The best method for determining the date of construction for your house or building is to identify it physically through either photographs, maps or aerial photographs.

## ☐ SANBORN INSURANCE MAPS (YEAR)

Sanborn Insurance Maps are the most complete historical maps available to most communities in the United States. Dating back to 1867, the Sanborn Map Company explored and revisited over twelve thousand communities, documenting in meticulous detail the structural evidence of urbanization - building by building, block by block. Two noteworthy innovations make Sanborn Maps invaluable for building research. First, the mapmakers devised a color code and divided buildings into construction type including Adobe, Concrete or Stone, Brick or Tile, or Wood Frame. Five color tints distinguish each building's material - olive for adobe, blue for stone, pink for brick, yellow for wood and gray for metal. (Combinations of colors on structures such as pink on yellow indicate the brick material on the building is a veneer and not a structural material.)

The most conspicuous innovation of Sanborn Maps was the manner by which the company revised previous work. Rather than recreating the maps from scratch for each successive edition – a daunting task in fast growing communities which might see map revisions every five years – the mapmakers reused previous base maps by pasting “patches” over any revised area on the base map. This efficient and economical technique by the Sanborn Company is also a boon to the researcher who can peer through the successive layers of patches to see if any prior building existed on the site.

The archives at the St. Petersburg Museum of History have three Sanborn Map series - 1918, 1939 and 1952. The museum archives, located at 335 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue NE, are open by appointment to the public for a fee. The number is 727-894-1052. The University of South Florida Tampa Campus Library also has the 1950 Sanborn Map for St. Petersburg on microfilm. It is located on the second floor of the library, call number 280, reel #17, and includes the years 1899, 1909, 1913, 1918, 1923, 1939, and 1952.

## ☐ AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH (YEAR)

Aerial photographs are beneficial to the house researcher in several respects. First, they can document the actual presence of your house at a given point in time, whereas other sources of evidence, such as building permit records, only indicate the issuance of a permit and not actual construction. In addition, aerial photographs can show the development of neighborhoods and commercial areas as infill occurs over time.

Since 1926, with a twenty-four year hiatus because of the Bust, Depression, and the Second World War, the City of St. Petersburg has been shooting aerial photographs. At three to five year intervals beginning in 1950 the city was photographed systematically up to the present. These records are maintained by the City Engineering Department on the Seventh Floor of the Municipal Services Complex, but hard copies are available onsite only since 1968. Earlier aerials must be retrieved from central storage and will take several days to process.



# CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG OFFICIAL SOURCES

Official sources from the City of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County provide other important historical information helpful in researching your historic home. The City reviews and issues building permits and records subdivision plats. Blueprint and construction documents have been maintained by the City since its inception, although frequently the earliest information is not available.

## ❑ PROPERTY CARDS & BLUEPRINTS

The City of St. Petersburg Development Services Department maintains extensive records relating to building permits issued for most structures in the city. Since 1987 all permits have been recorded on computer, allowing easy access to a record of all permits issued for your property. Between 1922 and 1987 permit transactions were recorded on Property Cards and divided into construction, mechanical and plumbing permits. Generally, when a building was constructed or altered the city issued a five-digit permit number corresponding to plan drawings, most of which have been recorded on microfilm and are available to the public. Please call the customer service line for Development Service at 892-5334 to allow city staff to research the property card and microfilm records. Our office is located on the first floor of the Municipal Services Complex at 1 Fourth Street North.

## ❑ SUBDIVISION PLAT

Subdivision plats are records of property and parcel divisions and establish the physical form of a building, neighborhood and city. The plat also contains signatures by the surveyor or engineer responsible for its preparation, the owner of the land, and the date recorded. Subdivision maps also can help establish a date before which your house was probably not built. Most buildings in the city were built in the twentieth century and after the land on which they sit was subdivided. In rare instances, oddly shaped or dimensioned parcels or different setback patterns for buildings may indicate the preexistence of a farmstead or house prior to the development of the neighborhood.

To obtain a copy of your original plat, first obtain a official book and page number for the subdivision from the Development Services Department on the first floor of the Municipal Services Complex. Generally, the book and page number is a letter of the alphabet followed by a number such as "I-46." This number will tell you which plat book to look in and on what page. Take this information to the City Engineering Department on the Seventh Floor of the Municipal Services Complex. Engineering maintains two sets of early subdivision plats recorded in St. Petersburg. The first two sets of books are numbered "H1" through "H7" and indicate the subdivision was recorded in Hillsborough County prior to Pinellas County's formation in 1912. The remaining ninety-eight books contain the remainder.



# PINELLAS COUNTY OFFICIAL RECORDS

## ❑ PROPERTY TRANSACTION RECORDS

Ownership records are best researched through Pinellas County's computer system and its Official Records indexes (hereafter known as "OR"). All property transactions after 1991 are recorded on the computer system in the official records office and one only needs a property identification number or PIN to access them. Using the "measurement" function you will be able to scroll down to find each 1990s property transaction as well as its corresponding OR Book and Page Number. However, to determine all the parties in the property transaction as well as any particulars you will need to consult the deed from the appropriate microfilm file.

Before 1991, ownership records can only be obtained by knowing at least one party in the transaction and can be found on the OR Index microfilm in alphabetical order by name. The OR Index records a variety of property transactions between parties including deeds, mortgages, second mortgages and quit claim deeds that elaborate on the property's history. The OR Index also displays individually each party in the transaction resulting in multiple records for the same transaction.

To research property transactions prior to 1957 you must go to the Government Complex in Clearwater. These records differ in format from their post-1957 counterparts by separating the "grantor" from the "grantee" on a different microfilm reel. They are also broken down into four multiyear intervals - 1927-34; 1935-1946; 1947-54; and 1955-57. County records do track all transactions between 1912 and 1924 on the same microfilm reel. Unfortunately, there are often problems with the quality of the data which may complicate your research task. For instance, although the separate grantor/grantee indexes are alphabetized (i.e., all the names beginning with "K" are lumped together), the transaction records within each letter are not, leaving you to go through all transactions within the same letter group. Finally, the gap between the 1924 Grantor/Grantee Index and the one beginning in 1927 might seriously complicate your efforts to locate the next owner in the chain if the property was sold during that intervening period.

In such an event you can turn to the Pinellas County Tax Assessment Rolls, which have been recorded every two or three years since 1911. Theoretically, these tax rolls can provide important information on the subject property, such as ownership, and provide potential clues as to when a building was constructed by showing unusual increases in property values or taxes. However, researching this data set could exhaust your patience without yielding any results. Although there is some semblance of order to the manner in which the records were kept such as compiling by city, subdivision and section/township or range, the property you are researching could show up anywhere within the St. Petersburg section, and there is no index. Consequently, you may have to look at every parcel before you find the one for which you are looking.

Most early deeds do not have the sales price on the instrument so you will need to derive the amount based on the documentary stamp costs included on the deed. These rates have changed over time and are assessed on a per \$100 basis. The rates are as follows:

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## ❑ PROPERTY TRANSACTION RECORDS (CONTINUED)

<b>Deeds</b>	<b>Rate</b>
1931 to June 30, 1957	\$.10
July 1, 1957 to June 30, 1963	\$.20
July 1, 1963 to September 30, 1979	\$.30
October 1, 1979 to June 30, 1981	\$.40
July 1, 1981 to June 30, 1985	\$.45
July 1, 1985 to May 31, 1987	\$.55
June 1, 1987 to May 31, 1991	\$.55
June 1, 1991 to July 31, 1992	\$.60
August 1, 1992 to present	\$.70

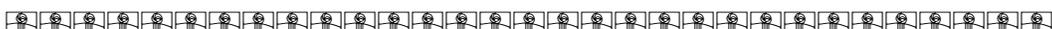
## OTHER HISTORICAL RESOURCES

### ❑ CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG DIRECTORY

Building permit and property transaction records do not necessarily define the precise year of construction. Absent physical evidence such as aerial photos or Sanborn Maps depicting your building at a specific point in time, the City Directory is often the easiest method to identify the year a building was constructed because it corroborates occupant information with a physical address.

Published annually (with one or two exceptions) since 1912 by the R.L. Polk Company, the City Directory compiled occupant information both alphabetically by name and by address. Information from the directories is often hit-and-miss as sometimes only the inhabitant and phone number are provided, while other records indicate the owner, the location of occupation, spouse and children. City directories also include a separate section devoted to business establishments.

There are limits to the usefulness of city directories and they are not error free. One should always corroborate directory evidence with property ownership records to ascertain the property owner. In addition, you should be aware that the St. Petersburg City Council renamed or renumbered dozens of streets in 1928, thereby complicating your house research prior to that year. Finally, until the second decade of the twentieth century, east-west and some north-south streets were numbered differently. You should consult Sanborn Maps and subdivision plats to determine these early street numbers. Upon request the Urban Design and Historic Preservation Division can provide a copy of the ordinance implementing the name/number changes for a small fee. Directories are available at the St. Petersburg Main Library or the St. Petersburg Museum of History.



## ❑ HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS

Five sources for photographs can be found locally. The *St. Petersburg Times* has an extensive collection of photographs dating from the inception of the newspaper. The St. Petersburg Museum of History has approximately 5,500 indexed city photographs, while Heritage Village in Largo has approximately 5,000 photographs and 2,500 slides concerning Pinellas County history. The collection is indexed by topic and community in a card catalog. The Village also houses thousands of newspaper clippings on various indexed subjects as well as scrapbooks containing various items. The University of South Florida-Bayboro also has the Jacobs Collection, containing 1,200 photographs from the 1920s currently being digitized for the USF Website. Finally, the downtown Tampa Library has many photographs with St. Petersburg as a subject.

## ❑ SECONDARY SOURCES

St. Petersburg is blessed with several fine books replete with excellent photographic collections which outline its history and may provide information on your house. Ray Arsenault's *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950*, is the most comprehensive and academic of all the city's histories and has an abundance of photographs that may yield unexpected evidence. Karl Grismer's *History of St. Petersburg: Historical and Biographical* (1924) and *The Story of St. Petersburg: The History of Lower Pinellas Peninsula and the Sunshine City* (1947) are very interesting books that provide biographies of the city's founding members and important business and civic contributors. Walter P. Fuller's *St. Petersburg and its People* is a 1970s publication which also provides some perspective on developments in St. Petersburg after the Second World War. Del Marth's *St. Petersburg: Once upon a Time: Memories of Places and People, 1890s to 1990s* and Hampton Dunn's *Yesterday's St. Petersburg* provide nostalgic views of our fair city. Finally, *Tampa Bay History*, a now-defunct academic journal located at the University of South Florida-Bayboro Campus, covered local history for twenty years and includes several essays, photographic and otherwise, on various aspects of St. Petersburg's history.

## ❑ PRIOR OWNERS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS

A potential source of information may be former owners/residents or their descendants. Many families have several generations which have resided in St. Petersburg and may retain photographs, documents and artifacts that would aid your house genealogy. First, start with the phone book to see if any names correspond with those of former residents which you have uncovered by researching the city directories. (See the previous page for a detailed discussion on how to research the City of St. Petersburg directories. If this does not yield any clues, check the Main Library for an obituary that may be indexed in the card catalog index of *St. Petersburg Times* and *St. Petersburg Independent* news articles. Obituaries will often provide the names of next of kin and their place of residence. Finally, if all else fails, call the Bureau of Vital Statistics to see if the former occupant died in Pinellas County, which would avail a death certificate complete with date of death. With this information in hand, research the obituaries in the two newspapers for several days after the date of death to see if one was recorded.



## ❑ ORAL HISTORY

Your neighbor may have lived in the same house for decades, a valuable source of information for pinning down dates of construction, alterations, neighborhood change, and prior owners and occupants. Take the time to interview them; if you are fortunate they may have early photographs of your house and neighborhood.

## ❑ RESEARCHING PRIOR OCCUPANTS

The lives of prior occupants may help yield clues to your home's history. Changes in household make-up with the addition of children or elderly relatives may explain when and why alterations to your home took place. Again, the best starting place for information on prior occupants is the St. Petersburg City Directories and from there, you can follow the trail through local, state and federal records as far as you wish to take it.

- ▶ **Wills and Probate Records:** Wills and related probate records can prove to be very rich sources of information. Even people who die without a will on occasion leave property which a court must administer. Probate records inventory, often with detailed descriptions, a person's property and indicate to whom it is left. Heirs usually include relatives who might appear in other records, and sometimes friends and favored organizations which are otherwise hard to identify.
- ▶ **Death Certificates:** With the date of the will, or sometimes the last entry in the City Directory, you can obtain the death certificate of the person who lived in the house. To obtain this, you must have the complete name, year of death and race of the person. Contact the Bureau of Vital Statistics in the 300 Plaza East Building, located at 31<sup>st</sup> Street North and 3<sup>d</sup> Avenue North. With the date of death you can search through the newspapers on microfilm and find an obituary that may give some biographical information about the deceased.
- ▶ **Obituaries:** Obituaries are also a good source of information on prior residents of your house. With names gathered from the City Directories, you can look them up in the Florida Newspaper Index located in the Main Library's Reference Department. The Index is not complete, but lists obituaries and news articles about many local people referenced in the *St. Petersburg Times* or the *St. Petersburg Evening-Independent*. Obituaries may also provide information about organizations the individual was involved with, which may in turn also keep records on that person.
- ▶ **Census Records:** United States Census records from 1890 through 1930 may also be useful in your research. While the primary purpose of the census is to accurately count Americans for legislative reapportionment, it also provides a rich source of individual history, particularly in the form of the manuscript census – the sheets on which the enumerators recorded information as they went from door to door. The manuscript records, for the years they are available, allow even closer examination of individual families, neighborhoods, farms, and businesses. Since the census takers usually covered their district systematically, house by house, street by street and always listed addresses, it is possible to compile a picture of a block or neighborhood. Ethnic, racial, occupation, and wealth patterns can be identified. High concentrations of blacks, foreign born, young or old, and male or female residents can be clues as to the special character of the neighborhood, as can the presence of unusual numbers of lodgers or households with the same family name. To preserve the privacy of individual records, the Census Bureau releases manuscript records after 72 years have lapsed. The 1930 manuscripts should be available by the summer of 2002. The microfilm records are available at Largo's Heritage Village. In addition, the Largo Public Library, as part of its extensive genealogical collections, has large holdings of not only local and Florida census records but other states as well.



# ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

## NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY

Since 1977 the City of St. Petersburg has been surveying downtown and older neighborhoods to identify and document historic and architecturally significant properties. To date, surveys have been prepared for the following neighborhoods: Old Southeast, Round Lake, Roser Park, North Shore, Historic Kenwood, Uptown, Crescent Lake, Crescent Heights, Euclid Place-St. Paul, Woodlawn, Allendale, Jungle Prada, Greater Woodlawn, Snell Isle, and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Street South Corridor. A copy of the neighborhood survey can be found at St. Petersburg's Main Library located at 3700 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue North.

These historic surveys have aided the preparation of nominations of several neighborhoods to the local and/or national registers of historic places. The nomination reports themselves contain valuable historical information on the neighborhoods and sometimes on individual houses within them. To date Roser Park and Granada Terrace (in North Shore) are the only designated local historic districts, but National Register nominations are being prepared presently for Downtown, North Shore, Round Lake, and Historic Kenwood. (Roser Park is also a National Register Historic District.)

## FLORIDA SITE FILE NUMBER

The City's architectural survey efforts have resulted in the documentation of more than 6500 buildings with Florida Site Files. These Files are two-to- three page records describing the existing physical characteristics of the building such as construction type, types of siding, roof, windows, foundations and building form, as well as owner's name, architectural type, and description of significance. The document also provides the approximate date of construction, and perhaps, the architect. Call City of St. Petersburg, Urban Design and Historic Preservation, 893-7153.

## ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

Architectural style is a good indicator of the era in which a building was constructed and can provide the homeowner with an understanding of the development history of his or her neighborhood. However, style alone will never provide enough information to accurately date the year of construction. For the homeowner, there are several good field guides for identifying house architecture, the most useful of which is Virginia and Lee McAlester's [A Field guide to American houses](#) (Knopf, 1985), which encompasses all the house styles that have been built in St. Petersburg.

St. Petersburg's architectural history spans two centuries and still retains a few architectural artifacts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but has its greatest concentration of historic resources between the beginning of the First World War in 1914 to the end of the Second World War in 1945. according to the city's Florida site file data, the vast majority of buildings constructed in St. Petersburg during that period were built in the following styles.



<b>Architectural style</b>	<b># built</b>	<b>% of Total</b>
Tudor	199	3.1%
Prairie	233	3.6%
Masonry Vernacular	343	5.4%
Colonial or Georgian Revival	358	5.6%
Mediterranean Revival	366	5.7%
Minimal Traditional	459	7.2%
Craftsman	780	12.2%
Bungalow	958	15.0%
Frame Vernacular	1939	30.3%

## DOES YOUR HOUSE HAVE A TWIN?

**A note on Architectural Pattern Books.** Unlike later decades of the twentieth century when developers assembled tracts and constructed homes in assembly-line fashion, many Americans constructed their own homes relying on the new building techniques and designs which were popularly distributed. During the first half of the twentieth century, companies including Sears and Roebuck, Radford, and the Ladies Home Journal would mail-order house plans and materials. From 1909 to 1933 Sears offered plans and materials for complete homes. After 1916, Sears also offered complete prefabricated houses to customers throughout the country, an opportunity that quickly led to underwriting mortgage loans and later to actual house construction through local carpenters from 1929 to 1934. Approximately 34,000 houses were sold by 1926, and by 1934 the figure would top 100,000. Another source of architectural plans was the Radford Company whose bungalow designs were disseminated for over twenty years through the pattern books of Henry Radford. The Ladies Home Journal, the most successful magazine in the world by 1925, was also instrumental in publicizing the new architecture of single-family detached living to many American families. In particular, the magazine popularized the bungalow by publishing the plans for a series of houses costing from \$1,500 to \$5,000 with specifications and estimates.









**This document was prepared by the  
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