DISCOVERING YOUR HOUSE'S STORY

A resource guide presented by the Santa Clara County Historical and Genealogical Society. Created by Kay Gutknecht. July 2023

Resource Guide
Discovering Your House's Story

Introduction

Every house has a story and this guide is designed to help you discover it. The Guide has three parts:

1. Getting Started: How to determine if any research has already been done on your house.
2. Gathering Key Facts: Where to find answers to key questions regarding a house's history.
3. Telling the Story: How to fit your house and neighborhood into the cultural and developmental history of your city.

Researching the history of a house is just as difficult as researching the history of an ancestor, and the more you know, the more you will want to know. Be aware that this document is not intended to be an exhaustive guide to finding every possible fact about your house. Rather it guides you to key sources of information that can help you build a foundational understanding of your house's history. Dozens, if not hundreds, of other resources are out there, and as you dive into your search, likely you will be enticed to follow obscure or neglected paths to other pots of gold.

Like genealogy, much of the research on your house can now be done from the comfort of your home office or even your couch if you have a laptop. Where resources are available online, this document provides a link you can access from anywhere. Know that some resources are maintained at the city level, others at the county level and even some at the state and national level. If you need to pay a personal visit to a records storage location, this document provides the address and access instructions. The type and quality of resources available at the city level varies greatly from city to city, generally in proportion to its age and size; some may have significant resources, others have few.

If the task of researching your house seems daunting, you can always hire a professional House Historians to do all or part of the investigative work for you. An experienced House Historian likely has investigated dozens if not hundreds of houses in your area and is familiar with architects and developers who worked during various periods. Their experience often allows them to piece together what seem like disparate facts, or to employ a less common resource to answer a question that has you baffled. Check with your local historical and preservation societies and your city's historical preservation department for possible referrals.

Getting Started

Before diving into any research, check first to see if some has already been done. If an individual house or an entire neighborhood has an historic designation or is on a candidate list for historic designation, it is possible all or at least part of your house's story is already written. If your house is on a Historic Resources Inventory (HRI) for your city, there may be related DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms documenting key historical and architectural information about your house. There are also HRIs at the national and state level, so be sure to check them as well.

It is also possible there are individuals working through what is typically a 15-20 year process to get a historic designation for your neighborhood. They may already have information on your house and/or would love for you to join the effort to get your house or neighborhood researched and recognized. Leadership of your local neighborhood association likely will know if anyone is working through the historic designation process for a neighborhood within its boundaries. They may also have other valuable insights or contacts which could help you.

Finally, don't neglect to visit your local library. They will have local history books and some, such as San Jose, Santa Clara and Los Gatos libraries have dedicated history rooms full of books and periodicals that often contain information about the history and architecture of houses in a particular neighborhood or of a particular architectural style or period. There is also a county-focused historical society, the Santa Clara County Historical and Genealogical Society (SCCHGS), which maintains an index to various books which mention historic properties. You can access the index at https://scchgs.org/documents/onlineindexes-docs/historic-homes-index.pdf, and the references are explained at https://scchgs.org/documents/onlineindexes-docs/historic-homes-references.pdf. Once you open the first document use **Control-f** (**Command-f** on a MAC) to search by street name.

Resources for Getting Started

The key resources to consult as you begin your research are:

1. Historic Resource Inventories: Lists of houses and buildings already recognized as potential historic resources by your city, state or the U.S. National Park Service
2. DPR: Official forms of the national Department of Parks and Recreation used almost universally to document the history and architecture of individual houses/buildings or neighborhoods.
3. Neighborhood Associations: Often the keepers of neighborhood histories and often aware of in-process work to document historic resources within its association boundaries.

The following matrix provides information on where to locate these three valuable resources at the national, state, and city levels. Each city in Santa Clara County is listed separately, so be sure you are using the information for the city where your house is located.

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
National	National Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	Provides instructions on how to search the registry and to find supporting documents at the National Archives.	National Register Database and Research - National Register of Historic Places (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	Links to supporting forms are accessed from the HRI	Use the link above for the HRI
California	California Historical Resources (CHR) for Santa Clara County		California Historical Resources
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	Click the Resource Name link in the CHR for a brief description	N/A
Campbell	NOTE: From the main page of the city's document management system, you can search by property address for a list of every document containing the address. Welcome to Laserfiche WebLink (campbellca.gov)		
	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)		Designated HRI structures - September 2022.xlsx (campbellca.gov)
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	While Campbell has no single online repository for DPRs or other descriptions of its historic resources, they can be found in numerous publically available reports and studies housed at this website.	Historic Preservation (campbellca.gov)
	Neighborhood Associations		Neighborhood Associations | Campbell, CA - Official Website (campbellca.gov)
Cupertino	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	Nothing located	N/A
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	Nothing located	N/A
	Neighborhood Associations	No inclusive list located	N/A
Gilroy	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)		Historic Resources | Gilroy, CA - Official Website (cityofgilroy.org)
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms		Historic Resources | Gilroy, CA - Official Website (cityofgilroy.org)
	Neighborhood Associations	No inclusive list located	N/A
Los Altos	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)		HRI Cover-G3.pub (losaltosca.gov)
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	Contact Sean Gallegos, Staff Liaison at 650-947-2641 to request a copy of the DPR for any property on the HRI. He will arrange for you to get a copy.	N/A
	Neighborhood Associations	No inclusive list located	N/A

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
Los Altos Hills	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	The HRI is an appendix to the 2007 General Plan	https://www.losaltoshills.ca.gov/179/General-Plan
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms		
	Neighborhood Associations	No inclusive list located	
Los Gatos	NOTE: The City also has a number of historic districts, and maps of their locations can be found at Historic Districts | The Los Gatos CA Official Site!. NOTE: The Local History Room of the Los Gatos Library has online instructions for conducting House and Property Research within the city, but you will need to visit the library to view the documents. Make an appointment by emailing history@losgatosca.gov. Records include photos, houses built before 1900 that received a city "Bell Ringer" award, 1941 Tax Assessment Survey, part of a 1991 field survey, Sanborn Maps, Polk's directories 1925-1974 (some years missing), and business and telephone directories as early as 1881-82, plus a number of helpful books and preservation records, plus free onsite access to ancestry.com. Los Gatos Library Local History Room 100 Villa Ave Los Gatos, CA 95030 408-354-6891		
	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	All houses built before 1941 are considered historic by town law.	N/A
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	The Los Gatos Library has the 1991 Anne Bloomfield survey in electronic format – please see library staff to check on your address.	N/A
	Neighborhood Associations	No inclusive list located	N/A
Milpitas	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	The City maintains a map of its historic resources.	Milpitas Historical Site Inventory | Milpitas GIS (arcgis.com)
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	None located	The HRI map has some data regarding each property, but it is extremely limited.
	Neighborhood Associations	The City maintains a map of neighborhood associations.	Home Owners Association | Home Owners Association | Milpitas GIS (arcgis.com)
Monte Sereno	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	None located. The Los Gatos Public Library may have information, because Monte Sereno was once part of that city.	N/A
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	None located. The Los Gatos Public Library may have information, because Monte Sereno was once part of that city.	N/A
	Neighborhood Associations	No inclusive list located	N/A

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
Morgan Hill	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	None located	N/A
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	None located	N/A
	Neighborhood Associations	No inclusive list located	N/A
Mt. View	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	Register of Historic Resources last updated Sep 20, 2017.	C-4 Local Historic Doc.pdf (livablemv.org)
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	None located, but there may be hard-copies in the Historical Association's room at the city library.	N/A
	Neighborhood Associations	No inclusive list located	N/A
Palo Alto	The City of Palo Alto has extensive resource available on the Historic Preservation section of its website. https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Departments/Planning-Development-Services/Historic-Preservation		
	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	Palo Alto has resources on the local, state and national historic resources lists. All can be accessed from the Historic Registers web page. Eligible properties may also have DPRs and can be located.	https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/planning-amp-development-services/historic-preservation/historic-inventory/city-historic-inventory-list.pdf
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	DPRs are not publically accessible, but can be requested for a specific property by contacting the Historic Resources Board Liaison, Amy French at: Amy.French@CityofPaloAlto.org or the Planning Department at: Planner@CityofPaloAlto.org.	N/A
	Historic Districts		Historic Districts – City of Palo Alto, CA
	Neighborhood Associations		Neighborhood Associations | Palo Alto Neighborhoods (paneighborhoods.org)
San Jose	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	City Landmark Registry	Historic Resource Inventory (arcgis.com)
		Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	Historic Resources Inventory | City of San Jose (sanjoseca.gov)
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	California Room at Martin Luther King Jr. Library. DPRs are photocopies in a binder.	N/A
	Neighborhood Association		Neighborhood and Business Associations (arcgis.com)

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
Santa Clara	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	Historic Preservation and Resource Inventory - List	SantaClara_Ch8-9_1-4-11.indd (santaclaraca.gov)
		Historic Preservation and Resource Inventory - Map	Historic Resources (arcgis.com)
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	Forms may be viewed at: Planning Division Community Development Depart 1500 Warburton Ave Santa Clara, CA 95050	N/A
	Neighborhood Association	No inclusive list located, but the association most interested in house history and historic preservation is the Old Quad Resident's Association. About — Old Quad Residents Association (oldquadsantaclara.org)	N/A
Saratoga	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	Heritage Resource List	https://www.saratoga.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/734/Heritage-Resource-List-PDF?bidId=
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	Heritage Resource Evaluations	https://www.saratoga.ca.us/300/Heritage-Resource-Evaluations
	Neighborhood Association	No inclusive list located	
Sunnyvale	Historic Resources Inventory (HRI)	Heritage Resources Inventory	Heritage Resources Inventory (ca.gov)
	DPR (Department of Parks and Recreation) forms	Brief descriptions of buildings considered local landmarks appear at the end of the Heritage Resources Inventory.	Heritage Resources Inventory (ca.gov)
	Neighborhood Association	No inclusive list located	N/A

Gathering Key Facts

This section provides a list of resources commonly used to gather the key facts most researchers want to know about their house. It includes:

1. A matrix of the key research questions, and the resources most commonly used to answer them.
2. Description for each resource (presented alphabetically), including information on where the resource can be found.

If searching these most common resources is not fruitful, it may be time to call in a professional or contact your city's library or historical society (if one exists) for additional guidance.

Resources for Gathering Key Facts

Key questions to answer when researching a house are listed in the first column of the *Resources for Gathering Key Facts* Table below. Check marks next to each question appear in the columns for specific resources that are helpful in answering that question.

	Architectural Style Books	Building Permits	City Directories	Contracts	Deeds and Patents	Maps County & City	Maps Parcel	Maps San Jose Block Book	Maps Sanborn	Maps Subdivision	Newspapers	Notice of Completion	US Census
1. When was my house built?[1]		√									√	√	
2. Is my house part of a subdivision/tract? If yes, what is the subdivision's name, when was it created, and who was the developer?					√		√			√			
3. Who designed and built my house?[2]		√		√							√		
4. What architectural style is my house?	√												
5. What changes were made to the house in prior years?		√		√					√		√	√	
6. Who owned my house before me?			√		√			√					√
7. Who lived in my house before me?			√								√		√
8. How did previous owners and/or tenants earn their living?			√								√		√
9. What was here before my house?					√	√							

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[1] The appropriate date to assign is the month and year when the house's original construction was completed. While websites like Zillow and Redfin provide Build Dates in their descriptions, these are not always the actual year the house was completed but generally are close enough to provide guidance in narrowing the search scope.

[2] Not all houses were built from architect renderings. Frequently, the builder of a house was also the designer. Today's permit process requires detailed drawings of the planned house but not so in the earliest years of the county.

Resources Described

If help is needed in using or interpreting information contained in the named resources, employees at the site where the resource is housed can help with how-to guidance.

Architectural Style Books

Architectural Style books can help identify the architectural style of a house. The definitive guide is: McAlester, Virginia Savage. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 2015. However, keep in mind that most of the homes in San Jose are vernacular buildings (local construction that does not adhere to formal, of "high" styles), so using local guides is also helpful.

The National Park Service has a good overview article entitled, "Bay Area Architecture" available online at [Bay Area Architecture (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)](#)

The City of San José has developed a guide for preserving homes within the city entitled *Your Old House Guide for Preserving San Jose Homes*. The book's second chapter provides descriptions of architectural styles found in San Jose, and these guidelines can be applied throughout the county. The guide is available online at [Your Old House | City of San Jose (govaccess.org)](#)

Building Permits

Building permits can help determine:

1. When a house was built: Locate the permit for the original construction and use the date on its related inspection marked "final."
2. Who designed and built the house: The permit for the original construction will list the architect, if one was used, and the builder/contractor.
3. What changes were made and when: Review all permits issued subsequent to those for the original construction to determine the types and dates of alterations and additions. However, remember, not everyone applies for a permit even if it is required, so you may personally have identified changes, but won't find a permit.

Building permits are issued by individual cities and are available for public viewing either online or in person as noted in the resource matrix at the end of this section. If a permit is not located for your house, it may have been built prior to permits being required in your city, or its location may have been unincorporated when the house was built. The date of annexation is generally included in the property information provided for your address in your city's building permit records.

Building Permit Resources

The following *Building Permit Resources* Table notes where building permits are located for each city.

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
Campbell	• List of building permits • Building permits	The link provided is an online portal where you can search for permits once you create an account. However, it will only be a list of permits, not the actual permit. Copies of actual permits are obtained by contacting the City Clerk's office at either: • MonicaM@ Campbell.gov OR • webdistributioncityclerk @campbellca.gov. The City Clerk will request the Building Division forward to you copies of all permits.	City of Campbell Permits (arcgis.com)
Cupertino	Building permits	From the Property Information link provided, enter the subject property address. Scroll to the bottom of the left panel and click the link "Search for Building Permits." A list of permits will appear; click on the "permit number" link to view the actual permit.	https://gis.cupertino.org/propertyinfo/
Gilroy	Building permits	Permits are maintained by the city's Building Division and can only be viewed in person at: Gilroy Building Division 7351 Rosanna St. Gilroy, CA 95020 408-846-0219	N/A – hard-copies only
Los Altos	Building permits	Permits can be viewed at City Hall. Contact Sean Gallegos, Staff Liaison 650-947-2641 for an appointment.	N/A – hard-copies only
Los Altos Hills	Building permits	Permits can be viewed by visiting: Town of Los Altos Hills 26379 Fremont Rd Los Altos Hills, CA 94022 650-941-7222	N/A – hard-copies only

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
Los Gatos	Building permits	Pending and issued building permits from 1994 forward can be viewed via the web using the link provided. Building permit history prior to 1994 is available to view via Laserfiche and/or Microfiche at the Town Building Division counter between the hours of 8 a.m. and 1 p.m., Monday through Friday. Town Building Division 110 E. Main St. Los Gatos, CA 95030 408-354-6876	https://permits.losgatosca.gov/Building/Search-Records
Milpitas	• List of building permits • Building permits	Results will provide a list of permits with summary data. To view the actual permit visit: City Hall 455 East Calaveras Boulevard Milpitas, CA 95035 408-586-3000 Check in at the information desk to gain access to a research computer. The desk is closed from 12-1 Monday - Thursday for lunch and closes at noon on Fri. No appointment is necessary.	https://trakit.ci.milpitas.ca.gov/etrakit3/Search/permit.aspx
Monte Sereno	Building permits	Building Permits may be viewed at: Building Department Monte Sereno City Hall 19041 Saratoga-Los Gatos Rd Monte Sereno, CA 95030	N/A
Morgan Hill	• List of building permits • Building permits	Use the Etrack portal link provided and select the following options: • Search By = Address • Search Operation = Contains A list of permits is provided. To view the actual permit, visit the: Building Division 17575 Peak Ave Morgan Hill, CA 95037 408-778-6480	https://morg-trk.aspgov.com/eTRAKiT/Search/permit.aspx

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
Mt. View	• List of building permits • Building permits	Use the link provided to obtain a list of permits. Permits are likely hard-copy only and maintained at the: Mt. View Public Library 585 Franklin Street Mountain View, CA 94041 650-903-6887	https://epermits.mountainview.gov/h.aspx
Palo Alto	Building permits	Building permits can be viewed at the: Gist Work Station 285 Hamilton, First Floor Palo Alto, CA 94301 650-329-2496 Hours are Monday - Thursday 8:30-4:30 closed from lunch from 12:30-1:30. No appointment is necessary.	N/A
San Jose	Digitized permits	Digitized permits.	Online Permit Services | City of San Jose (sjpermits.org)
	Paper permits for 1920-1929 NOTE: These permits usually do not include a house number; rather the build site is given in relation to the nearest cross street.	Sourisseau Academy for State and Local History at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library. Call 498-808-2064 or email: research@sourisseauacademy.org for an appointment.	N/A
	Building permit Indexes for a variety of years from 1895 to 1986	California Room of the Martin Luther King Jr. Library.	Building Permits | San Jose Public Library (sjpl.org)
	Paper inspection cards from 1920's NOTE: These list contractors by trade—building, plumbing, electrical, and fixtures.	California Room of the Martin Luther King Jr. Library.	N/A All inspection cards are paper only
Santa Clara	• List of building permits • Building permits	The link provides a list of permits. To view the actual permit, visit the: Building Division 1500 Warburton Ave Santa Clara, CA 408-615-2420 Hours vary seasonally, so check ahead of your visit.	https://aca-prod.accela.com/SANTACLARA/Cap/CapHome.aspx?module=Building&TabName=Building
Saratoga	Building permits	Permits can be searched online after creating a login.	eTRAKiT (saratoga.ca.us)

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
Sunnyvale	• List of building permits • Building permits	The link provides a list of permits. Likely hard-copies are available at the: Dept. of Planning & Building 456 W. Olive Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94086 408-730-7440 408-730-7444	https://ecityhall.sunnyvale.ca.gov/cd/h.aspx

City Directories

City directories can help identify:

1. Previous residents—owners and tenants
2. What previous residents did for a living

City directories are the precursors to city phone books. Beginning in the early 1900s, in addition to an alphabetical list by surnames, the directories included a reverse directory by street and house number. Contact your local library to determine what city directories are available for research.

The California Room at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library in downtown San Jose has a few directories available online, and a large number of print volumes are available for use in the library. It also has within its collection a number of directories for other cities in the county. Review the extent of the collection at Directories, City of San Jose and Vicinity | San Jose Public Library (sjpl.org).

Calisphere University of California also has a number of San Jose City Directories available online. Go to City Directories — Calisphere.

The California State Library in Sacramento has city and county directories for every county in California. Most volumes are not online, but you can search the library's database to determine if they have the specific city directory you need. More information is available at Directories - California State Library.

Probably the easiest way to peruse city directories is to use an online subscription source like Ancestry. Visit their U.S. City Directory site at U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995 to determine what cities and years are included in their online collection. Check with your local library to see if they have a subscription to Ancestry that you can use at the library.

Several libraries in the county provide access to city directory images if you have a library card and some have subscriptions to Ancestry.com that you can use onsite. So check with your local library for city directory availability.

Contracts

Contracts can help identify:

1. Who designed and built the house—particularly for years not covered by building permits
2. Changes made to the house over the years—particularly for years not covered by building permits

Into the early 20th century, details of building contracts between the property owner and the builder of a house were frequently published in local newspapers or from 1911-1932, in the *Building and Industrial News (BIN),* a local industry journal. These published contracts are an excellent source of owners, architects and builders information for houses constructed during periods not covered by building permits.

Internet Archive is the primary resource for searching the *BIN* online. The *BIN* was published weekly, and issues are bound in books covering six month periods: January through June and July through December.   Use the following steps to search issues of the journal.

1. Go to www.archive.org to access the main page for *Internet Archive*.
2. In the search bar, type **Building and Industrial News**.
3. Select **Search Metadata** and press **Go**.

   Scans of the bound journal covers are presented, and you can view the dates covered by hovering your mouse over the individual covers.

4. Select one of the journals to search its contents.

5. Select the search icon in the upper left corner, just under the Internet Archive heading

    and type in a key word for your search, such as a street name or subdivision name. Quotation marks ("") should be placed around a search comprised of multiple words, such as "The Alameda."

   Textual results appear in a bar on the left side and blue tick marks appear on a timeline under the journal. Selecting a tick mark allows you to jump to the actual page in the publication that contains the article where the text was found.

Additionally, local newspapers should also be searched. See the "Local Newspapers" section for information about online newspapers.

Deeds and Patents

Deeds can help identify:

1. The subdivision/tract, if any, that the house is part of
2. Previous owners of the house

Patents will identify the first buyer of the land from the U.S. Government. It's a great resource for understanding property ownership for early pioneers.

Deeds are available online from computer terminals maintained at:

<div align="center">

County of Santa Clara
Office of the County Clerk-Recorder
70 West Hedding St.
1st Floor, East Wing
San Jose, CA 95110

</div>

A research appointment can be booked at [Online scheduler for SCC Clerk-Recorder's Office - Research In-Person Appointment in San Jose, CA (fullslate.com)](#) to avoid possible long waits AND to be assigned to a clerk who can help with how-to instructions on the various computers and their capabilities.

To identify the ownership history for a house, begin with your personal deed and identify the seller (Grantor). Then search by the seller's name to find out when they were the Grantee (buyer) of the property and then locate the deed. Repeat this process until you work your way back to the original owner, likely the subdivision developer. For recent years, all this can be easily accomplished on the computers with digitized deeds and online search capabilities. However, for earlier deeds, such as in the 1800s, you will need to switch computers that access microfilmed indexes and deeds. Note that only deeds were microfilmed, so if your search of the Grantor/Grantee Indexes reveals other documents (e.g., lis pendens, mortgages, agreements), you will need to visit the Santa Clara County Archives to view the original document. Visiting the Archives will also be helpful when the microfilm of your deed is a very poor or incomplete copy. Note the book and page number where the document was recorded and email the information to the Archive at Archives@rec.sccgov.org when you contact them to schedule a visit.

Maps

Maps can help identify:

1. The subdivision/tract, if any, that the house is part of
2. Changes made to the house in prior years
3. What, if anything, was on the property prior to your house

County and City Maps

Your local library or historical museum/society likely has some historical maps for your city and/or the county. Maps are a great way to see the development of an area over time, beginning even as early as the Mexican Era. Many can be found online: simply search by Santa Clara County or the name of your city. Below are some of the more famous Santa Clara County maps, and links to a map of San Jos, and another link to a variety of maps related to the City of Santa Clara.

1. Harlan-Young Press Map of Santa Clara County Ranchos

   [Map of Santa Clara County Ranchos : Harlan-Young Press : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

2. Thompson and West Historical Atlas Map of Santa Clara County 1876.

   [Santa Clara County 1876 California Historical Atlas (historicmapworks.com)](#)

   Additionally, a Name index to the 1876 Historical Atlas Map of Santa Clara County, California can be found at: https://scchgs.org/onlineindexes/histories/twiz1876.html.

3. 1890 Map of Santa Clara County by Hermann Brothers at The Library of Congress (shows property owners of larger parcels)

   https://www.loc.gov/item/2012592102/

4. 1929 Map of Santa Clara County by McMillan & McMillan at Archive.org

   https://ia601708.us.archive.org/27/items/map_santaclaracounty_1929/map_santaclaracounty_1929_panel01.jpg

5. 1886 Map of San Jose by James Clayton at The Library of Congress (no names, but shows individual lots)

   https://www.loc.gov/item/2012593206/

6. Some additional maps of Santa Clara

   https://content.scu.edu/digital/collection/maps

Parcel Maps

The Office of the Assessor, County of Santa Clara has parcel maps that show land as it is portioned for tax purposes. These maps contain the name of the subdivision(s), if any, of which the parcels are a part. Figure -1 which follows is an example of a Parcel Map; the subdivision name has been circled in red. You can find the parcel map for your house by searching your property address at the following URL. Then select the **Print Assessor's Parcel Map** link in the upper right to view the map.

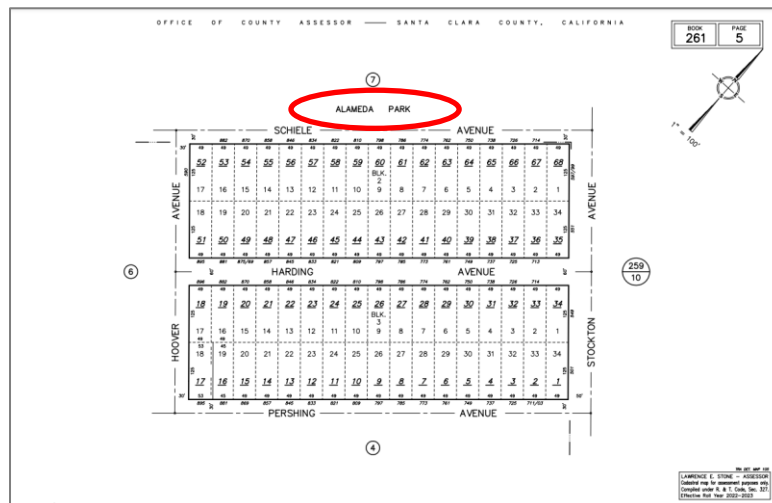   https://www.sccassessor.org/index.php/all-situs-search?SFrom=all&SType=rp&STab=apn&apnValue=12005077

Figure 1 - Office of County Assessor, Santa Clara County, CA, Parcel Map for Book 261, Page 5

The County of Santa Clara Surveyor's Office also provides an online search tool to find and display Assessor Parcel Maps. See the information provided below for Subdivision Maps to learn how to access and use this tool.

San José Block Book

Block Books show the boundaries of all lots within the City of San José along with names of property owners. The California Room at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library has a 1909 version and a 1924 version with updates into the 1940s. History San Jose has San Jose Block Books circa 1925-1965. Digital block books are available for 1871 and 1882-1886 using these links:

[1871 City of San Jose Block Book - Historic Map & Atlas Collection (SJPL California Room) - CONTENTdm Title (sjlibrary.org)](#)

[1882 City of San Jose First Ward Block Book - Historic Map & Atlas Collection (SJPL California Room) - CONTENTdm Title (sjlibrary.org)](#)

Sanborn Maps

Sanborn Maps were created for insurance purposes and are street maps that include footprints of the structures located on the included streets at a specific point in time. The maps can be accessed online at the Library of Congress using the following link. There are maps for: San Jose, Los Gatos, Mt. View, Mayfield, Palo Alto, Santa Clara, Campbell, Gilroy, Sunnyvale, Milpitas, Alviso, Cupertino, Morgan Hill, and Saratoga.

https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/about-this-collection/

The San Jose Public Library (SJPL)has a collection of local Sanborn maps, including some that are not available at the Library of Congress. For example, they have the 1930-1943 Sunnyvale map (although it is black and white only). Some actual hardback volumes can be viewed in the California Room of the library. Also, digital access to San José and other California Communities, 1867-1970 is available for library cardholders at the following site:

[Digital Sanborn Maps | San Jose Public Library (sjpl.org)](#)

SJPL also has a number of Sanborn maps on microfilm. Use the following link to view a list of these resources.

[Search | San José Public Library | BiblioCommons](#)

Subdivision Maps

Subdivision maps include the owner/developer and the date recorded, which would be the most appropriate date to use for when a subdivision was created. If the subdivision was created from rancho land, the map should also include that information. Unfortunately, the last upgrade to the search tool precluded the ability to search for subdivision maps by the subdivision name. So, a cross-reference matrix is needed to find the Santa Clara County Recorder's Office book and page numbers where the subdivision map was recorded. SCCHGS has both the cross-reference matrix and a how-to guide for finding subdivision maps using the Search Tool; links to both are below.

Resource	Link
County Surveyor's Search Tool	County Surveyor's Office Record Index Search Tool
Cross Reference Matrix of Subdivision Name to Recorder's Office Book and Page Numbers	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EHDUpJmLBjst4_oVJYHBQBAhGpuCnzNu/view?usp=sharing
How-to Guide – Access Santa Clara County Subdivision Maps Online	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XXmCUpD1uLDvz-dvJSGYrXjtKWWt5LU5/view?usp=sharing

Newspapers

Newspapers can help identify:

1. When your house was built
2. Who designed and built the house
3. Changes made to the house in prior years
4. Who lived in the house previously
5. How previous residents earned their living

Newspapers are an invaluable source, because you never know when your house or its previous owners or residents will show up in the news. The best online resource for local newspapers is the *California Digital Newspaper Collection*, a project of the Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research at the University of California Riverside. Filters are presented in a banner on the left of the screen to help narrow results, and the order in which results are presented can be sorted in a variety of ways using the **Sort by** dropdown in the upper right of the screen. Access the site at:

California Digital Newspaper Collection (ucr.edu)

Search Tips

- Search on street name and year range of completion "Waxwing" 1950-1960
- Search on surname "Collette" or first initial and surname "F Collette"
- Search on lot and block "lot 24 block 2"
- Search on subdivision name "North Glen Park" and year range of completion

While the California Digital Newspaper Collection does not include newspapers for San Jose after 1920, the San Jose Public Library (SJPL) supports access to the *San Jose Mercury News* for the years 1900-1985 from the following *Newsbank* website; a SJPL library card is required:

https://login.sjezpt01.sjlibrary.org/login?qurl=https://infoweb.newsbank.com%2fapps%2fnews%2fbrowse-pub%3fp%3dAMNEWS%26t%3dpubname%253A1126156B6E3010F0%2521San%252BJose%252BMercury%252BNews

Notices of Completion

Notices of Completion can help identify:

1. When a house was built
2. Changes made to a house in prior years

Until the early 20th century, when construction on a home was finished, Notices of Completion were typically published in local newspapers or the *Building and Industrial News,* a local industry journal. These published notices are an excellent source for the build dates of houses constructed during

periods not covered by Building Permits. See the information provided under "Contracts" and "Local Newspapers" for details on how these sources can be searched online.

US Census

The US Census can help identify:

1. Who lived in the house previously—owners and tenants
2. How previous residents earned their living

The US Census is taken every ten years and includes information for California from 1850-1950. Access is available online for free at FamilySearch.org or for a subscription fee at Ancestry.com. Several libraries in the county provide access to free census images if you have a library card. Some also have subscriptions to Ancestry.com that you can use onsite. So check with your local library for census availability.

Questions vary with each census. For information about what data was collected and more, visit the National Archives "About Census Records" at:

[About Census Records | National Archives](#)

Telling the Story

Once you have the facts about your house, you may want to document its story. Many of the cities in Santa Clara County have prepared a Historic Context Statement which describes historic periods, themes, events, and people that contributed to its development as a City. This is a great place to begin an understanding of how your house and neighborhood fit into the cultural and developmental history of your City. Also, local museums and societies can usually help put your house into a historic context and provide material for use in telling its story. Consult the *Resources for Telling the Story* Table below, to determine if a Historic Context Statement, or historical museum or society exist for your city.

Resources for Telling the Story

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
Campbell	Context Statement	1996	Historic-Overview-and-Context-Statement (campbellca.gov)
	Historical Museums and Societies	Campbell Historical Museum	www.campbellmuseums.com
Cupertino	Context Statement	Cupertino maintains a brief history of the city on its website	https://www.cupertino.org/our-city/about-cupertino/history
	Historical Museums and Societies	Cupertino Historical Society + Museum	https://cupertinohistoricalsociety.org/
Gilroy	Gilroy has a City Historian whose primary role is to publish articles about the City's past. These can be accessed at: https://ca-gilroy.civicplus.com/806/City-Historian		
	Context Statement	2020	Microsoft Word - Gilroy Historic Context and HRI Update Document_final CLEAN (cityofgilroy.org)
	Historical Museums and Societies	Gilroy Historical Society	Gilroy Historical Society
Los Altos	Context Statement	The Los Altos Context Statement is incorporated in the April 2011 Historic Resources Inventory Section II	Microsoft Word - HRI Section II, Historic Context.doc (losaltosca.gov)
	Historical Museums and Societies	Los Altos History Museum	https://www.losaltoshistory.org/
Los Altos Hills	Context Statement	Los Altos Hills maintains a brief history of the city on its website and a History Anthology published in 2016	https://www.losaltoshills.ca.gov/218/Town-History https://www.losaltoshills.ca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/677/LAH-History-Anthology-1956-to-2016-PDF?bidId=
	Historical Museums and Societies	Los Altos Hills Historical Society - website includes a "Resources" section with information about key historic houses within the city limits	Los Altos Hills Historical Society (losaltoshillshistory.org)

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
Los Gatos	Context Statement	None located , but the library has extensive information on the town's history. Los Gatos Library Local History Room 100 Villa Ave Los Gatos, CA 95030 408-354-6891	N/A
	Historical Museums and Societies	Los Gatos Historical Society	Home | Los Gatos Historical Society
Milpitas	Context Statement	None located	
	Historical Museums and Societies	Milpitas Historical Society	Milpitas Historical Society – Official Website of the Milpitas Historical Society
Monte Sereno	Context Statement	None located, but the city has a history page on its website	Monte-Sereno-History-(montesereno.org)
	Historical Museums and Societies	None located	N/A
Morgan Hill	Context Statement	The 2006 Context Statement includes photos and brief descriptions of representative properties for each historic period covered by the report	Historic-Context-Statement (ca.gov)
	Historical Museums and Societies	Morgan Hill Historical Society	Home | Morgan Hill Historical Society
Mt. View	Context Statement	Available at the Mt. View Public Library, which has a history center on the second floor. Location: Mountain View Public Library 585 Franklin Street Mt. View, CA 94041	N/A
	Historical Museums and Societies	Mt. View Historical Association	Home - Mountain View Historical Association
Palo Alto	Context Statement	A History of Palo Alto is available on the Planning & Development department website.	History of Palo Alto – City of Palo Alto, CA
	Historical Museums and Societies	Palo Alto Stanford (PAST) Heritage, a nonprofit organization supporting the preservation of the historic architecture, neighborhoods, and character of the greater Palo Alto-Stanford area through informed citizen involvement and education. Its website includes n Historic Buildings Inventory and information on local architects and builders.	Palo Alto Stanford (PAST) Heritage Inventory of Historic Buildings (pastheritage.org)

Location	Resource	Comments	Link
San Jose	San Jose has a number of district/neighborhood-level context statements that can be viewed at [Existing Context Statements | City of San José (sanjoseca.gov)](#)		
	Context Statement	Historic Overview and Context dated 1992	[6376973083037700000 (sanjoseca.gov)](#)
	Historical Museums and Societies	History San José	[Home - History San Jose](#)
Santa Clara	Context Statement	A City History is available on the City's website	[City History | City of Santa Clara (santaclaraca.gov)](#)
	Historical Museums and Societies	Santa Clara County Historical and Genealogical Society	[https://www.scchgs.org/](#)
Saratoga	Context Statement	2009 – entitled Heritage Resources Inventory	[https://www.saratoga.ca.us/DocumentCenter/View/968/Heritage-Resource-Inventory---Context-Statement-PDF](#)
	Historical Museums and Societies	Saratoga Historical Foundation	[SHF Home (saratogahistory.com)](#)
Sunnyvale	Context Statement		[Sunnyvale-Context-Statement (ca.gov)](#)
	Historical Museums and Societies	Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum Sunnyvale Historical Society and Museum Association	[Homepage - Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum](#)