



RESOURCES FOR EDMONTON HOMEOWNERS

RESEARCHING YOUR HERITAGE HOME

A GUIDE TO DISCOVERING THE HISTORY OF A RESIDENTIAL STRUCTURE

The Edmonton Historical Board | The City of Edmonton Archives | City of Edmonton Sustainable Development

Looking to learn more about the history of a home in Edmonton? This publication guides you to resources and describes approaches you can take for successful results.

Research: A doorway to knowledge

You might be conducting research on a property out of general interest or in advance of applying for historical designation. Or perhaps you are looking to renovate or make an addition to a structure or property and want to preserve or restore its original character.

Regardless of your goals, an organized approach to learning about a property's history will help you make the most of your time. And knowing where to look and who to ask may reveal facts about, or at least render clues to, many aspects of a structure's history, including:

- How it looked originally, both inside and out
- The changes or additions made to it over the years
- The year of its original construction, its builder, and the materials that went into it
- Its previous occupants
- The makeup of its neighborhood and surrounding areas
- The social and cultural environments in which it existed

Nailing down the cost

While you'll likely pay nominal fees for photocopying or government records processing, your main cost will be in your time. Even then, depending on how much information you want

and how far the records and your patience take you, it typically takes only a few hours – visiting a few different locations for resources and speaking with key people – to uncover a number of pertinent facts about a building's history.

Conducting your research

While researching a house, you will often find yourself guided by what you discover along the way. Information gathered in one place can lead you to more information in another, and so on.

Start close to home

It's a good idea early in the process to ask neighbors what they know about the history of your property. They may also know of long-term residents in the area who may remember former owners or tenants of your home. You can also check with your community association to see if a local history has been written, which may contain information on former residents. Finally, consider putting a notice in your community newsletter asking people with knowledge of local lore to contact you.



Reference Room at the City of Edmonton Archives.



A man stands in front of the Prince of Wales Armouries ca. 1915 in one of the archives' earliest photos of the building. Photo credit: City of Edmonton Archives, EA-29-166.

Step out to the City of Edmonton Archives

The City of Edmonton Archives is located in the Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre. At the Archives, you'll find a large concentration of useful resources for your research. While staff cannot conduct research for you, they can be very helpful in assisting you to identify and locate the resources you need. It's always a good idea to call the reference desk before visiting.

Remember to take along basic supplies—pencils (not pens!), paper, and even a magnifying glass for looking at fine print. A trip to the archives can also be a chance to do something with a friend or family member, and it's nice to have someone along to spell you off and give your eyes a break from the microfilm reader.

The Archives houses a wide variety of records, publications, photographs, and other materials, which are constantly being acquired, catalogued, and made available to the public. Depending on such factors as your property's age and location, some resources will be more or less useful to you.

Visit the Archives' website at archivesphotos.edmonton.ca, where you'll find a variety of heritage-related news, information, and links. You can browse or search the continually growing online archival photographic collections. Online catalogues for other archival resources are being introduced on an ongoing basis.

City of Edmonton Archives

Address: 10440 - 108 Street

Reference desk phone: 780-496-8711

Web: edmonton.ca/archives

**Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday
8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

Wednesday: 8:30 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Closed on weekends and holidays

Available resources

Henderson's Directory

The names and occupations of those who have been associated with your property are some of the most basic kinds of information you need for further research. This is particularly true when you're looking for information in resources like newspapers and records of official government correspondence.

To this end, the Henderson's Directory is invaluable. It was a commercial directory published annually until 1987. Organized by address and neighborhood, it lists names, addresses, and other information about residents and businesses.

Hard copies for 1907 to 1987 are available at the City of Edmonton Archives. The University of Alberta makes the directory available online for the years 1908 to 1953 at peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/2962.html. A selection of other directories is available at the Archives dating to 1895, although not every year is available.



A Henderson's Directory on display.

Using the Henderson's Directory

While land title records are a more accurate way to date a house, you can discover an approximate construction date using the Henderson's Directory. Check the volume for the year in which you believe your home was built. If you find it there, see whether it was built earlier than you thought by going back a few years, until it no longer appears, then move forward. Once you've found the earliest entry and discovered the occupant's name, look for that name at the back of the volume for such information as the occupant's employer, occupation, spouse's name, and ownership status.

If your house was built before the City annexed its neighbourhood, chances are it will not appear in Henderson's for those years, and a building permit may not have been issued. You may be able to find your house listed in the directory only for the years after annexation. Check the back of this brochure for other resources that might be helpful in ascertaining its date of original construction.

While Henderson's is a researcher's boon, note that it is not always perfectly accurate. Spelling errors and transposed street and avenue numbers are not uncommon. Also, the listed occupant is not always the owner—he or she may have been renting, renting to own, or in the process of purchasing the property.

Photographs

The Archives houses a large and growing collection of photographs. They are indexed

by building, house, street, business, people, and neighbourhood. While you won't likely find photographs donated by previous owners of your house, it can be worthwhile to look for a scene of your street or a nearby landmark in hopes of catching sight of your home in an earlier era.

Aerial photographs

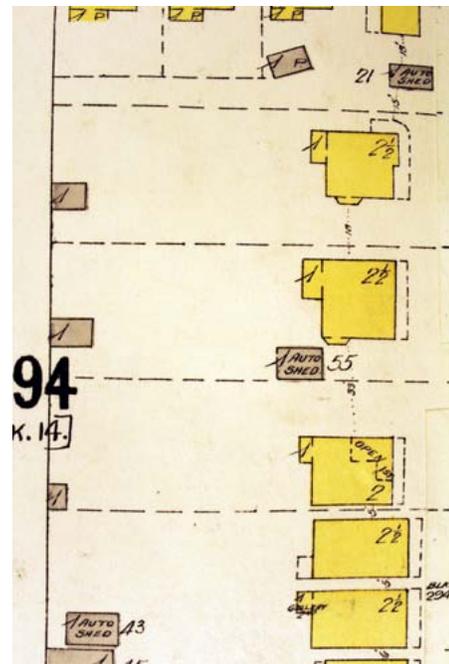
At the Archives you'll find aerial photos from the City dating from 1924 to 1997. For various reasons, the collection is not complete, so see the back of this brochure for alternate sources for maps.

Fire insurance maps

The Archives has fire insurance maps for various areas of Edmonton dating from 1913 and 1953 to 1964. There is also a General Key Plan dating from about 1925 that shows various Edmonton neighbourhoods, but it is neither as detailed nor as complete as the fire insurance maps.

Property titles

To purchase copies of previous titles and other documents relating to your property, first visit the Alberta Registries website at alta.registries.gov.ab.ca/spinii. Using your legal description, you will find the last two titles. To go back farther, take your description to the Land Titles office in the John E. Brownlee building at 10365 - 97 Street or to an Alberta Registries office.



Fire insurance map example.

Building permits

The Archives has building permits on microfilm dating from 1905 to 1961, and from South Edmonton (Strathcona) from 1912. Permits may have been issued two years prior to occupancy.

Blueprints

Very few blueprints are available for individual residences, but it is worth checking for one with the Reference Archivist. If an architect designed the house or a major renovation, there is a better chance that you will find a plan for it. If there is no plan for your own house, it is possible that one exists for a similar house (or, perhaps, one with a mirrored design) in your neighbourhood. Note, however, that blueprints for older homes typically contain far less detail than those for modern ones.

City of Edmonton correspondence

Transfers to the Archives from the City of Edmonton are known as record groups and are indexed with the prefix RG. You can look through correspondence for such items as homeowners' complaints to the City about various issues (e.g., road conditions, neighbours' yards, etc.), which can occasionally lead you to a former occupant.

Newspapers on microfilm

During your research, you might want to find out more about a builder, about a neighbourhood development, or about real estate history. Newspapers from the past are a great resource. The Archives has a selection on microfilm dating from the 1890s to the present. At the time of this printing, the Edmonton Journal is unavailable at the Archives for many dates between 1976 and 1982. While the gaps are being filled, however, you can find all the editions for this date range at the Stanley Milner Library downtown.

Clipping files

The Archives has a growing collection of newspaper clipping files on biographical, general, and City department subjects. These files are catalogued in a database that the Reference Archivist can access for you on request.



The Edmonton Archives has an extensive microfilm collection.

Private manuscript files

In Archives terms, anything donated to the City by a private citizen or business is considered a private manuscript. Records received in this category are indexed as MS groups. In such groups you will occasionally find something relevant, such as a donor's scrapbook containing reference to a person or place you are researching.

Non-lending library

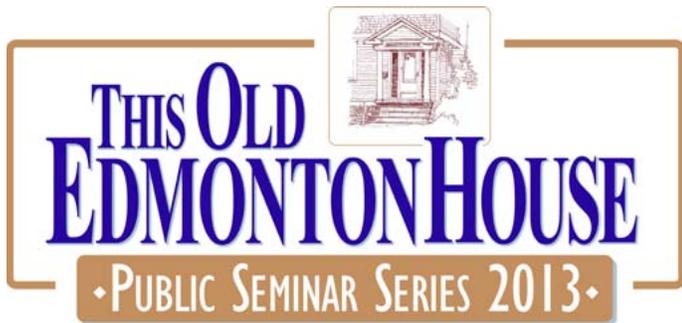
A small non-lending Library at the Archives contains various local, biographical, practical, and technical publications dealing with subjects pertinent to Edmonton and its citizens. You can also find trade publications, catalogues, and manuals about home décor in this collection. Although these items cannot be signed out, and some are too fragile for photocopying, they can be a treasure-trove of information on Edmonton's history.

Heritage resources and designation

Structures that are eligible for historical designation or protection are typically significant for their architecture, design, construction, or association with notable local or national historical figures.

This publication does not focus on historical designation, but it is worth mentioning because appropriate research and the careful restoration of your property can be a step toward such recognition if desired.

To learn about the benefits of owning a designated heritage resource, please visit edmonton.ca/historicresources or contact the City of Edmonton's Heritage Planners at 780-496-5281 or 780-496-6123.



This Old Edmonton House

The City of Edmonton facilitates courses on a variety of topics relating to heritage properties. In addition to a course on researching your heritage structure, there are several others designed to give you insight into materials and methods you can use to maintain, repair, and restore it while preserving its historical integrity.

For further information, phone 311 or visit edmonton.ca/thisoldhouse.

Other resources

City of Edmonton Maps
maps.edmonton.ca

Land titles

Phone: 780-427-2742
Web: servicealberta.ca/landtitles.cfm

Provincial Archives of Alberta

Phone: 780-427-1056
Web: <https://hermis.alberta.ca/paa>

Canadian Architectural Archives

University of Calgary
Phone: 403-220-7420
Web: caa.ucalgary.ca

Peel's Prairie Provinces - Henderson's Directories

University of Alberta

Web: peel.library.ualberta.ca/henderson.html

Alberta Heritage Digitization Project

Web: ourfutureourpast.ca

Aerial photographs

City of Edmonton Roadways Design & Mapping
Phone: 780-496-6636

Web: edmonton.ca/business_economy/maps_aerial_photos.aspx

Alberta Aerial Photograph Collection

Web: ourfutureourpast.ca/airphotos

Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development

Phone: 780-944-0313 Toll free 1-877-944-0313

Web: srd.alberta.ca/MapsPhotosPublications/AirPhotos/Default.aspx

Archives Society of Alberta

Web: archivesalberta.org



Historical Board
logo