



## HOW TO RESEARCH YOUR OLD BUILDING

Presented by the  
Bowling Green-Warren County Historic Preservation Board

You may want to research the history of your building so that you can plan a more accurate rehabilitation/restoration project or you may want to do it just for the fun of it. Property research is like an entertaining detective novel where you compile the clues and solve the mystery.



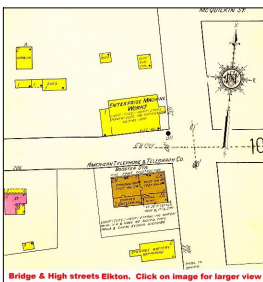
The best place to locate your first clues is at the Warren County Courthouse at 429 10<sup>th</sup> Street in downtown Bowling Green. In the basement are the deed records. With the address of your property you can look up the most recent “Book #” and “Page #” for your property. These two numbers will lead you to the most recent deed. That deed will give you another set of book and page numbers. Just keep following these deeds backwards as far as you can go. This will give you a chain of title. It is helpful to know that the “grantee” is the buyer and the “grantor” is the seller. Little clues like how much the property sold for might reveal when major improvements were made. Language such as “lot without improvements” followed in later years with language such as “house and lot” can help you narrow down the construction date. Sometimes the deeds will reference a will book or plat that you can also find in the basement. Just ask for help. The staff there will be more than willing to get you started.

Next go to the top floor of the courthouse to see the staff of the Property Value Administrator. Their records might provide you with an old photograph, but no older than the 1950s. These records also reveal information about the structure such as age, square footage, and building materials.

Now that you’ve got your first set of clues you need some additional information to bring the history of your building into focus. Your next few hints may be found at the Kentucky Library and Museum on Western Kentucky University’s campus. If your property is within the city limits you might want to check the city directories and the Sanborn maps. If your property is in the county you will want to check the agricultural census information and the Beers map.



The directories reveal intelligence such as the occupation of early occupants and whether or not the house might have had boarders or been rental property. You will definitely want to compare the information you find here with the results of your deed search.



The Sanborn maps at the Kentucky Library are old fire insurance maps for the City of Bowling Green. On these maps you can see the footprint of your building, giving you an idea as to when changes might have been made. The Sanborn maps, like the PVA records will also provide information about the building such as number of stories and construction materials.

The agricultural census records are a wealth of information, providing the names of the people who worked the land and, in many cases, what they grew and how much. Comparison of this information with general agricultural census records for the County or the region, will help to place your farm in perspective.

The 1877 Beers map is of all of Warren County with blowups of Bowling Green, Smith Grove, Oakland, Woodburn, Rockfield, Rich Pond Grove and Delafield. Major land owners are noted on this map.

The Kentucky Library also has a terrific collection of old photographs. Your property might show up here. I also like to take the names of property owners and tenants that I have collected and see if there is anything in the "vertical files" at the library.

These are just a few of the resources available that will give you basic information about your old building. Share your research with the librarians at the Kentucky Library as that might help them to steer you in the right direction. And don't ignore the physical clues that might exist within and around your old building or the memories of our elders. As each new clue fits into place you will likely stumble upon new avenues to search.

Many have found that learning about the history of their building has strengthened their desire to improve the structure. There is no doubt that it will give your old house or building a personality you couldn't even see before. Happy hunting.

Contacts:

Kentucky Library and Museum  
[www.wku.edu/Library/dlsc/index.html](http://www.wku.edu/Library/dlsc/index.html)  
270-745-6258

Warren County Property Value Administrator  
<https://warrenpva.ky.gov>  
270-843-3268