

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board

Researching Your Historic Property

By Scott Rogers

Have you ever wondered about the history of your house? Who built it? Who has lived here over the years? With some careful research, you can find out about both the house and those who inhabited it.

When starting your search, it is important to note that historical information can take many different forms. It can be written, visual, physical or verbal. Compiled, they can work together to begin forming a complete picture of your home's history.

Where do you start?

First of all, try to find out what is already known about your property and those associated with it. Ask the City Planning Department if they have a file for your address. Is your home on the National Register of Historic Places? If so, contact the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in Salem and request copies of the nomination form. Your home was most likely researched as part of the nomination process. In addition, check with any local historians to see if they have already gathered some information.

The next thing you will want to do is determine an accurate legal description and address of the property. This will help tremendously when trying to track down information from other sources, as street names and house numbers often change over time. For example, here in Forest Grove the streets were renamed in 1949 and all house numbers were changed from three to four digits. A good place to start looking for the description are tax lot maps,

created by city or county governments. They will help you determine the legal tax lot address.

Now you're ready to start your information search.

You might want to start by consulting legal documents to create a "chain of title". This is a timeline that you can make, listing those who owned the house and for what period of time. Good sources for this information include legal documents such as deed records and mechanical liens, abstracts, wills and mortgages:

An Abstract is a summary of all legal transactions. Ask the current or previous property owner, or a title company.

A Deed can provide a list of people associated with the property and the construction date. It is often signed only by women if their husbands owned a business - then if the business was lost the home would be safe. Check with the County Courthouse.

A Mechanical Lien (often filed with the Deed) can provide a detailed list of materials and labor used to build the house.

Mortgages (a temporary pledge of property to a creditor as security for the payment of a debt) provides a good description of the property including outbuildings, fences, trees, etc. They are indexed by year at the Assessment and Taxation Office.

Wills (legal declarations of how one wishes their property to be dispersed after death) offer specific

information on the house, furniture, tools, etc. Ask for them at County Clerk's Office.

Now that you've collected as much legal documentation as you can find, make a chronological list of information taken from each source. Include all the dates and details that are pertinent to your property.

From your timeline, you should have a good list of people associated with the property from builder to present owner. Chances are you would like to know a little more about each of these folks, and there are many sources for such information. Start by checking with local historians to see what they have already found. Then you might want to search for all or some of the following: birth, death, and marriage records, obituaries, family genealogies, gravestones and cemetery records, school and military records, biographies, social security records, diaries and letters, U.S. census records, city directories and phonebooks, newspapers, library indexes, social organizations, town histories, photographs, sailing and immigration records, oral histories (ask neighbors and relatives), and the Internet.

To research the structure itself, look at what you have already gathered from city surveys, the National Historic Registry nomination form and information from local historians. To find out more, you will want to consult maps (such as city/county plat maps, insurance maps, Metzger maps, Wilkes maps, Sanborn maps), and also any local archives (such as the Eric Stewart Collection) for old papers, postcards, photos, and other records from an earlier time. Look at tax assessment records (usually found at the County Clerk's Office) and building permits. Search the library and Internet for architectural styles and architectural plans. Look at the structure and property itself - they often provide the strongest clues.

By now you should have quite a collection of interesting information about your property. The search can take a lot of time and effort, but the rewards in the end will no doubt give you much satisfaction. It would be great to organize all of it into a scrapbook of some kind and display it in your home as a reminder of the history of the place, of which you are now a part.

Local Resources

Eric Stewart Collection

Housed in the Forest Grove City Library
503-992-3247

Friends of Historic Forest Grove and History
Room 503-992-1280

Forest Grove City Library
503-992-3247

(microfiche of Forest Grove newspapers)

Pacific University Archives
503-359-2204; by appointment only/not open to the public

City of Forest Grove Community Development
Department 503-992-3227
(historic surveys, property files, maps)

Mary Jo Morelli, local historian
503-313-9785

Janet Lamb, architectural historian
503-359-4814

Washington County Clerk's Office
503-846-8888

Washington County Office of Assessment and
Taxation 503-846-8741
(recorded deeds, liens, mortgages, tax
assessments, maps)

Washington County Historical Society and
Museum 503-645-5353
(research library with 20,000 indexed photo-
graphs, manuscripts, city files and reference
books)

State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
503-986-0686, by appointment
(National Register nomination forms, historic
resource inventories, historic context statements)

References

"Researching Your Historic Property", a
workshop taught at Pacific University in Forest
Grove, Oregon by Janet Lamb, architectural
historian.

What to do if you or your contractor digs up human remains on your lot

By Dustin Kollard

1. Stop work!

The responsible superintendent on the job site, or yourself, should stop all grading and tape the area off.

On most construction jobs where there is high potential for the discovery of human remains, a Native American monitor and an archaeologist's representative should be on-site during grading. These persons should direct the grading contractor to stop work and fence off the area where the remains were found. Anyone associated with the project may call the building official and coroner, but if there is an archaeologist on site that person would be best qualified to describe the find to the coroner.

2. Notify the City's Building Official.

The Building Official is responsible for monitoring events at the site, assuring that state laws are carried out.

3. Notify the County Coroner and State Police.

The Coroner has two working days to examine the remains after notification. If the coroner determines that the remains are Native American (or has reason to believe that they may be), he or she must notify the Commission on Indian Services.

4. Contact an archaeologist, the Commission on Indian Services, and the State Historic Preservation Officer.

In Forest Grove, human remains stand a good chance of being Native American. Therefore, it is appropriate to call in an archaeologist if one isn't already on site and have him or her call the commission required.

The Commission on Indian Services is a state commission, formed in part to identify all known graves and cemeteries of Native Americans on private and public lands. The Commission is also responsible

for determining which Native American group is most likely descended from Native Americans interred in any specific gravesite.

When notified of a burial site, the Commission must notify immediately those persons it believes to be most likely descended from the deceased Native American. With permission of the property owner or authorized representative, the descendent(s) may inspect the site of the discovery and may make recommendations to the owner or excavator on the disposition of the remains and associated grave goods. Such recommendations must be made within 24 hours of notification by the Commission, and may include a recommendation for scientific removal and nondestructive analysis of the remains.

The Commission has the power to mediate any disputes between landowners and known descendants about the disposition of the remains and any associated artifacts. Agreements the Commission oversees must provide protection to Native American human burials and skeletal remains, and provide for sensitive treatment of the remains consistent with the intended use of the land.

If no descendent is found or the descendent does not make a recommendation, or if the landowner or representative rejects the descendants' recommendation, and mediation by the Commission does not provide a satisfactory solution to the landowner, the landowner must re-inter the remains and associated items with appropriate dignity on the property in a location not subject to further disturbance.

Felony. It is a class C felony to obtain or possess any Native American artifacts or human remains taken from a Native American grave or cairn except as provided by law.

Clark National Register Historic District Brochure

The Historic Landmarks Board is proud to present an informational brochure on the Harvey Clark National Register Historic District. With general information, history, photos, a map and a walking tour, this brochure will be a great resource to help highlight this

wonderful section of town and publicize this historic resource we have. Look for it at City Hall, the library, and other locations.

Special thanks to local graphics designer Amy Rogers for all her hard work!

Preserving Forest Grove is a quarterly newsletter published by the Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board to help fulfill its duty of public education regarding the preservation of cultural resources. If you would like to be on the mailing list, please contact James Reitz at 503-992-3233, or JReitz@ci.forest-grove.or.us.

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board Grant Program

Is your house on our local *Register*? If it is, did you know that your house is eligible for restoration and rehabilitation grant funding? The Historic Landmarks Board has funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work such as restoring architectural features or if you have structural work to do such as foundation repair, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant. Come see us! We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to any problems you may have.

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board
Monty Smith (Chair).....503-357-7804
.....montys@orel.ws
Scott Rogers (Vice Chair).....503-357-8265
.....SRogers@extensis.com
Elizabeth Muncher (Secretary).....503-357-6168
.....Elizabeth.A.Muncher@tek.com
George Cushing.....503-357-3389
.....greenacres2@verizon.net
Jon Stagnitti.....503-357-6369
.....semangati@yahoo.com
Dustin Kollar.....503-992-0037
.....dkollardc@aol.com
Claude Romig.....503-359-1886
.....kalekop@comcast.net

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***Historic Landmarks Board
City of Forest Grove
PO Box 326
Forest Grove, OR 97116***

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