

Researching Your House's History in Clackamas County, Oregon¹

Probably the most often asked question we get at OLHD is “can you tell me the history of my house?” Unfortunately researching the history of one’s house or property can be quite involved. It is a rare occasion when the house’s history has already been documented in a historic landmark or historic survey publication. More often than not the researcher will need to employ a number of tools in an effort to reconstruct the history. But there are enumerable discoveries awaiting the determined researcher. This guide should help you in that effort. In general the newer the house the more easily its history will unfold, and the older it is the more time consuming the research will be. Below are some general steps that you should follow.

STEP ONE: COLLECT READILY AVAILABLE INFORMATION

- 1) Find out what you can from neighbors or, if possible, the previous owner or occupants. Find out what is said about its history, previous owners, builder, or its construction date. Record everything you can – names and dates are important.
- 2) If you own the house pull out your **tax statement**. You will need to jot down the address, Account number (also referred to as the “parcel number”), and **Map number** (e.g. 21E12_____ or 32E06 _____) located at the top of the statement. If it’s not your house you will need the address.
- 3) If you have access to a computer go the Clackamas County’s **CMAF website** – Clackamas County’s Online Mapping Application <http://cmap.clackamas.us/> This website is an extremely valuable tool. You will be able to access your target property information using address, parcel number (a.k.a. “account no. from a tax statement), **Tax Lot Number** (a.k.a. “map number” from a tax statement), or even the intersection using two nearby road names. Once located you will see a map of the target property along with a host of other information. Make a copy of the

map, and note the “Year Built” (see more on year built further in this guide), “Map Number (TLNO)”, “Parcel Number”, and “Est. Acres”.

4) Armed with the above information make a trip to **the Clackamas County Tax Assessor’s Office** (“Assessment and Taxation”). If you don’t have access to a computer this will be your first field trip stop.

STEP TWO: CLACKAMAS CO. “ASSESSMENT AND TAXATION OFFICE”

For this step you will need to have on hand at least the address of the target property. The clerk will gladly get you started.

The County has a number of in-house computers. Use one of these to access the information about your target property. Using the address the computer will bring up the information about that property, including the name of the current owner.

Currently the Assessor’s Office is using a computer program called “Ascend 3.8, Public Access Property Inquiry”, which they started using in 1999. This program is a bit temperamental, and searching for information about a target address can be a bit tricky. Just ask for help if you have trouble.

- 1) Click on the “Assessment” box on the main screen
- 2) Password is “PUBLIC”; this will open another box
- 3) Next to the “Property No.” box click on the 3-dot button which enables you to search by address
- 4) In the “Situs Address Line 1” box enter the house number, followed by an *, followed by PART of the road name, followed by an *
- 5) Click “OK”

This should bring up one or more hits. Select the correct target address by clicking on it.

Once the information for the correct target address appears make a note of the “**Property No.**” as well as the “**Alternate No.**” (e.g. 22E18CD_ _ _ _). Assuming that your target house was built before 1999 you will need this information.

The computer data should provide you with the name of the current owner, name of the taxpayer (usually one and the same), the approximate year built (if after 1900²), and should list transfer events (transfers of ownership) back to about 1999. Write all of these down or print them out (prints will cost you 25 cents each). There may also be valuable information in the “Memo” section.

Be sure and also investigate the “Jacket” tab by entering the “**Real Property No.**” that you had noted earlier. This section may provide valuable information that will be helpful to you.

If the county records indicate your house was built within this time period (1999-current year) you are finished with this step, and can then go to other resources listed in this guide. If the county records indicate that your house was built prior to this time period you will need to go to the “Deed Books” in the same office. These books are not accessible to the public, and you will need to ask the clerk to pull the appropriate book for you.

DEED BOOKS:

Proceed to the main desk, and using the “**Map Number**” from the tax statement, the “**Map Number (TLNO)**” from the CMAP website, or the “**Alternate Number**” from the Public Access Property Inquiry program³ (e.g. 22E18CD_ _ _ _ _) ask for the corresponding “**Deed Book**”. The clerk will locate the appropriate target property within the “Deed Book” for you.

Deed Books were the official record that the county used to keep track of ownerships for a few years prior to converting to the computer system in 1999. The first page should be a miniature copy of the OLDEST deed they have for this property in the Deed Book. Either photocopy this page or make a note of the legal description of the property. The same deed will be listed on the back of the page, along with subsequent ownership changes up until the implementation of the computer system in 1999. The oldest owner’s name(s), date, Deed Volume, Deed Page, and Acres Remaining are important. Equally important are the “Twp.”, “Rge.” and “Sec.” (Township, Range and Section No.) recorded for “Map Number” at the top of the page with the list of owners. Write them down or more simply photocopy the page(s). The combination of the identified owners,

between the Deed Book and the computer system, provide you with a complete list of owners and dates back to the oldest owner listed in the Deed Book. But if the county records indicate that the house was built further back than the date of entry for the oldest owner in the Deed Book you will need to follow the trail of owners back further. This means another field trip to a different county office.

STEP THREE: CLACKAMAS CO. “RECORDER’S OFFICE”

The Clackamas County Recordings and Elections Division is where one looks up property transactions back to the early 1850’s. Deeds and mortgages are kept on microfiche and microfilm. For this next step you will be using copies of actual deeds, coupled with two separate indexes to the deeds – said indexes using the names of either the grantor (seller) or grantee (buyer). Just to confuse us, the indexes are called either the DIRECT (grantor/seller) or INDIRECT (grantee/buyer). You will be following the trail of transfers of ownership BACK in time from one owner to the next previous one, building a “chain of ownership”.

During this step it is important that you not skip a transaction – which is easy to do as you’ll see that individuals were often buying and selling several properties at various times and various places within the county throughout a given time period. You must make sure that you are following the trail of the correct target property.

The Direct and Indirect Indexes are grouped in spans of years. You need to locate the name(s) and date of the deed conveying the target property to the “oldest owner” you found from the Deed Book. That “oldest owner” will be listed in the INDIRECT INDEX (as the buyer) for the time period those indexes are grouped by. As you don’t know yet when that “oldest owner” bought the property this will be somewhat of a guess. Start with the time period in which you know the “oldest owner” sold the property, and work back to the next earlier time period if necessary.

The INDIRECT INDEX is organized by surname, 1st name or initial (and sometimes middle initial), Section, Township, Range, Book and Page. The Section, Township

and Range correspond with the first part of the Map Number you had noted in steps one and two above. The Book and Page are important references to where the actual deed was recorded. The surnames for the Indirect Index are organized alphabetically by the first few letters of the surname. Pull the microfiche corresponding to the first few letters of the “oldest owners” surname.

Using the individual’s name look for entries for them. There may be more than one, each on a different date. You are searching for a deed for a property in the Section, Township and Range you identified from the Deed Book. Sometimes the index will only indicate the Township and Range. Sometimes it will indicate the Section(s), Township and Range. And other times it may also indicate a lot number or subdivision name (e.g. “Concord”, “Oregon City”, or “Linn City”). These all are important for narrowing down the field of possible properties to the one you want, so as to avoid going off on a “goose chase”.

When you locate a likely candidate use the date, book and page number from the index to locate the actual deed in the “Deeds” microfiche collection.

Eventually, if you keep repeating this process over and over, you should get back to a grantor being “U.S.A.”, which generally designates the name of the person that a Donation Land Claim was granted by the U.S. Government.

¹This is Draft 1 by the Oak Lodge History Detectives; Michael G. Schmeer; May 2015

² Houses estimated to have been built prior to 1900 will often show 1900 as the default year built

³ Sadly, Clackamas County uses different terms for the same property reference number. The Map Number is a reference to the property’s location on the county’s tax maps. The first few characters refer to the **Township, Range and Section Number**, followed then by letters and digits that refer to a smaller subdivision and tax lot no. Township, Range and Section Number are critical references used in the Rectangular Survey System adopted when our area was first surveyed before statehood in the early 1850’s.