



House and Building Research at Brooklyn Historical Society

House and building history is one of the most popular topics of research here at BHS. Our library and archival collections have a great variety of materials useful in piecing together the history of Brooklyn neighborhoods, blocks and buildings.

Following is a guide to our resources most frequently consulted by those doing research on Brooklyn property and buildings. You can scroll through the entire page, or click on the links below to take you to the description of a particular resource.

Landmark Reports

If your building is within a landmarked neighborhood, you will want to consult the report published by the [NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission](#). Our library has most of them, you can search our [online catalog](#) to see our holdings, or you can search the [Neighborhood Preservation Center's database](#) of landmark reports-- they have most of the full reports scanned and available online. If you are interested in [purchasing a copy](#) of your neighborhood's report, you can do so through the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission's website. Landmark reports vary from neighborhood to neighborhood, however sometimes you can find out the date your building was built and identify the architect.

Historic Atlases (1846-1932)

Our Historic Atlas collection serves a multitude of purposes, but is particularly helpful when trying to determine the age of a building. They are also helpful in trying to determine varying addresses -- which had a tendency of changing pre-1900. Most of our atlases are bound fire insurance maps, which show Brooklyn block-by-block. As the atlases advance chronologically, they also advance in technical sophistication. Depending on the level of detail, atlases can include information such as the material content of every building, house and block numbers, content and condition of pavement, street status and usability, locations of sewers and water mains, locations of subway and rail lines, plate boundaries, section and ward division lines, and original farm lines, among further information. A full listing of the atlas collection, including a years, surveyors, and neighborhoods, is available [here](#).

Brooklyn Land Conveyance Collection (1699-1896)

Another helpful resource available at BHS are the Land Conveyances Collection. This collection documents Brooklyn land ownership from the late 17th Century through to 1896. Organized by block, these abstracts show seller (grantor) and buyer (grantee) information. It is sometimes possible to find out the original owner of a particular plot, which can lead to finding out who and when a particular building was built. These conveyances are also great when focusing on the social history of a particular property. Further information about the collection is available [here](#).



Brooklyn Directories (1820-1913, 1933)

Our collections hold several different types of Brooklyn directories, which were precursors to the phone book, listing the name and address of people or businesses. We have several types of directories in the library:

City Directories – Organized alphabetically by name, these directories work just like phone books, only instead of listing phone numbers they list a person's address; in addition, they sometimes list other information such as their occupation and work address. Our collection of directories is on microform, and spans from 1820 to 1913 (and one bound one from 1933). Further information on our City Directories is available [here](#).

By Address -- "Elite Directories" (their name, not ours). Our collection of these run from 1873 to 1913. These are particular helpful when trying to do the social history of a particular building. Once you have clear all of the addresses a particular place might have had, you can consult these to find out who was living there. Using these names, you can go back to the "by name" directories and find out what a particular resident did for a living.

Blue Books -- As suggested by the name of these directories, these are a collection of social directories. However they do have a "by address" look up in the back, again helpful when trying to get to who might have lived at a particular address.

Brooklyn & Long Island Scrapbook Collection (1860-1960)

This is a collection of newspaper clippings from the 1860s to the 1960s. All of the articles that were originally pasted into scrapbooks have been put onto microfiche and are searchable through a subject card index in the library. While the articles in this collection answer a whole host of varying questions, they are also useful when researching a specific address and/or individual(s).

Architecture Books

Our library has a number of useful reference books about architecture in general and about Brooklyn architecture specifically, you can find the titles we have by searching our [online catalog](#). If you are researching a building within "Brownstone Brooklyn" (i.e. Fort Greene, Brooklyn Heights, Cobble Hill, Clinton Hill, etc.) Francis Morrone's [An Architectural Guidebook to Brooklyn](#) is a great starting point.

Real Estate Brochure Collection

The archives holds a collection of real estate brochures, primarily advertising new apartment buildings, which includes materials running from the 1920s through the 1950s.



The collection is organized by neighborhood; a paper index with exact street addresses of the buildings included in the collection is available in the reading room.

[Guide to Research Outside of Brooklyn Historical Society](#)