Researching House Histories: Resources in the Grems-Doolittle Library

Books

Researching and Writing House Histories

Green, Betsy J. *Discovering the History of Your House and Your Neighborhood.* Santa Monica, Ca.: Santa Monica Press, 2002.

Howe, Barbara J. *Houses and Homes: Exploring Their History.* Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1987.

Light, Sally. *House Histories: A Guide to Tracing the Genealogy of Your Home.* Spencertown, N.Y.: Golden Hill Press, 1989.

Rose, Christine. *Courthouse Research for Family Historians: Your Guide to Genealogical Treasures.* San Jose, Calif.: CR Publications, 2004.

Guides to Architectural Styles

Andrews, Wayne. *Architecture in New York: A Photographic History.* New York: Atheneum, 1969.

Blumenson, John J.G. *Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide to the Styles and Terms, 1600-1945.* American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

Eberlein, Harold Donaldson. *Historic Houses of the Hudson Valley.* New York: Bonanza Books, 1942.

Embury, Aymar II. *The Dutch Colonial House: Its Origin, Design, Modern Plan and Construction.* New York: McBride, Nast & Company, 1913.

Gill, Brendan. *A Fair Land to Build In: The Architecture of the Empire State.* Albany, N.Y.: Preservation League of New York State, 1984.

Gross, Geoffrey, et al. *Dutch Colonial Homes in America.* New York: Rizzoli International, 2002.

Lassiter, William L. *Shaker Architecture: Descriptions with Photographs and Drawings of Shaker Buildings at Mount Lebanon, New York, Watervliet, New York and West Pittsfield, Massachusetts.* New York: Vantage Press, 1966.

Lathrop, Elise L. *Early American Inns and Taverns.* New York: Tudor, 1935.

Lewis, Arnold. *American Victorian Architecture: A Survey of the 70's and 80's in Contemporary Photographs.* New York: Dover Publications, 1975.

McAlester, Virginia. *A Field Guide to American Houses.* New York: Knopf, 1984.

Meeske, Harrison. *The Hudson Valley Dutch and Their Houses.* Fleischmanns, N.Y.: Purple Mountain Press, 1998.

Mercer, Henry C. *The Dating of Old Houses.* Doylestown, Pa.: Bucks County Historical Society, 1923.

Books, cont.

Poppeliers, John C. *What Style Is It?: A Guide to American Architecture*. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1983.

Pratt, Richard. *A Treasury of Early American Homes*. New York: Whittlesey House, 1949.

Reynolds, Helen W. *Dutch Houses in the Hudson Valley before 1776*. New York: Dover, 1965.

Stevens, John R. *Dutch Vernacular Architecture in North America, 1640-1830*. West Hurley, N.Y.: Society for the Preservation of Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture, 2005.

Schenectady County Homes, Farms, and Neighborhoods

Note: Local histories, not listed here, can also be helpful; they may mention or describe a local home, farm, business, or neighborhood, trace the history of settlement, or offer biographical information.

Dunn, Shirley W. *Dutch Architecture Near Albany: The Polgren Photographs*. Fleischmanns, N.Y.: Purple Mountain Press, 1998.

Hamilton, Claire. *The Teller Pasture: An Investigation of a Place, People, and Events That Changed the Dutch Colonial Village of Schenectady*. Iuniverse Inc., 2010.

Keefer, Donald A. *The Vrooman House at the Brandywine Mills, Schenectady, New York*.

Keefer, Donald A. *Stockade District of Schenectady*.

Maston, Bruce. *An Enclave of Elegance: A Survey of the Architecture, Development, and Personalities of the General Electric Realty Plot Historic District*. Schenectady, N.Y.: Schenectady Museum, 1983.

Papp, John. *The American Stockade Area in Schenectady, New York: A Photographic Tour Through One of America's Most Unique Sites, 1690-1971*. Schenectady, N.Y.: John Papp Historical Publications, 1971.

Richmond, James. *The Union Street Yates House*.

Rittner, Don. *Schenectady's Stockade: New York's First Historic District*. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia, 2008.

Schenectady Museum & Schenectady County Historical Society. *Walkabout of Old Schenectady*.

Segall, Annette. *The Schenectady Stockade: A Study in Neighborhood Rehabilitation*.

Sisario, Peter. *The Stockade in All Seasons*.

Staffa, Susan. *Colonial Schenectady in Maps*. Schenectady, N.Y.: [s.n.], 1985.

Staffa, Susan. *Schenectady Genesis: How a Dutch Colonial Village Became an American City, ca. 1661-1800*. Fleischmanns, N.Y.: Purple Mountain Press, 2004.

Stearns, Charlotte. *Union Street Historic District: Nineteenth Century Growth and Architecture*.

Stringer, Denise L. *Finding Home in Niskayuna*. Self-published, 2011.

Van der Bogert, Giles. *Walls Have Ears*. Schenectady, N.Y.: Schenectady Herald Printing Co., Inc., 1966.

Vrooman, John J. *Forts and Firesides of the Mohawk Country*. Philadelphia: Elijah Ellsworth Brownell, 1943.

West Glenville Community Day. October 5, 1996. *A Tour of Historic Homes*.

Building/Structure Inventory Forms

These forms, many of which date from the 1970s and 1980s, include information about a building or structure (i.e. a barn), including a name by which the building is known, address, present owner, original and present use, building material and structural system, condition, notes on related outbuildings, property, and surroundings, notable features, and notes on the historical and architectural significance of the building. The form may include a small map

of the property and/or a photograph of the building. The buildings documented are **not** limited to properties that have been recognized on state or national historic registers.

Locations covered in our library: Schenectady, Eastern Avenue, Glenville, Niskayuna, Rotterdam, Princetown.

Applications for Historic Markers

These materials consist of application materials submitted to the Schenectady County Historical Society for historic markers. Many of the applications refer to properties in the Stockade, although there are also applications for buildings in other parts of the city and county.

Maps and Atlases

Sanborn Maps
These detailed maps offer information about building material and structure, street address, and other building features.
Editions in our library: City of Schenectady – 1884, 1889, 1892, 1894, 1900 (updated to 1912), 1914 (updated to 1924 and 1929), 1930 (updated to 1949/1961). Rotterdam Junction – 1913.

City/County Atlases
These atlases include some building material information, street numbers, and sometimes owner or resident names.
Editions in our library: Schenectady County (incl. city) – 1866. City of Schenectady – 1880, 1892, 1905.

Other Selected Maps
1850 City of Schenectady map – shows some owners/building features
1856 Schenectady County map – shows ownership

Directories

City directories offer an alphabetical listing of residents, their occupations and addresses. Directories also include guides to local businesses and amenities and a guide to current streets. Beginning in 1930, directories include a section of listings by street address in addition to an alphabetical listing. Library volunteers have also constructed listings by street address for a few of the earliest directories.

Some directories only include the city of Schenectady; many include Scotia and some include other towns in Schenectady County. See city directory list on library shelf for more details about years and localities covered.
Years covered in our library: 1841, 1857-1858, 1860-1968, 1980, 1984.

Tax Lists / Assessment Rolls

Copies of a number of colonial-era tax lists can be found in the clipping file. We also have copies of the 1813, 1816, and 1910 assessment rolls for Schenectady and the following tax/assessment rolls for Duanesburg (1836, 1840, 1841, 1844, 1849, 1858, 1859, 1862, 1864, 1866, 1868, 1873, 1878, 1882, 1885-1889, 1891, 1892, 1894, 1900-1904, 1907) and Glenville (1821, 1822, 1828).

Wills

When conducting deed research, you may find a gap in the chain of title. Wills can sometimes help to fill in these gaps of ownership. They also provide useful biographical information and might include information about a house, furniture, or other property. Our library has Schenectady County wills on microfilm for the years 1809-1901. Additionally, you may find copies of wills in the Historic Manuscripts Collection or in a surname file. Our library also has some published abstracts of wills.

You can also find wills, probate records, and letters of administration in the Schenectady County Surrogate's Court.

Albany County Records

Schenectady County was established in 1809; prior to that date, Schenectady and its surrounding towns were part of Albany County. We have in our library a collection of large ledgers that index Albany County deeds, mortgages, and maps from this time period. The original documents may be found at the Albany County Hall of Records.

Photograph Collections

Although we do not have item-level indexing for all of our photographs, lists of headings of folders in our photograph collections are available. Some historic houses have their town files; otherwise, seek photos of your street, neighborhood, farm, or town. In some cases, photographs of a home or farm may be included with photos of a particular family under the surname photograph listing.

Additionally, we have in our holdings a series of photographs taken of every property in the Stockade in 1962, when the neighborhood was designated a historic district.

Clipping Files and Surname Files

Clipping files consist of a variety of photocopied information – mostly newspaper articles, occasionally photocopies of original documents and photographs or compiled histories – about a topic. Lists of file headings for the city and county are available. Some helpful categories include streets, neighborhoods, businesses, tax lists, ethnic groups, fires/floods, ghosts. Surname files provide biographical and genealogical information; occasionally, they may also include information about a house, farm, or business associated with a person or family.

Census Records

Federal and New York State Census records are a great resource for finding biographical information about residents of a home. In the context of house histories, they may provide information about the building material and assessed value of a home, and tell whether the occupants rent or own the home. Census information can also show whether there were one or more units in the building or provide agricultural information. Looking at the census entries in context can also provide information about the demographic makeup of the neighborhood or community.

Our library has microfilm copies of most New York State and Federal Censuses, along with a number of printed indexes and transcriptions. We also have a subscription to online services which offer searchable, digital access to census records.

Historic Manuscripts Collection

The Historic Manuscripts Collection comprises many of the original documents in our collections prior to the 20th century. This collection, which includes deeds, wills, legal matters, correspondence, accounts, and other documents, is indexed by name in our card catalog.

Other than deeds and other land-related records, Vault Book (VB) 79 is especially useful for house history researchers. VB 79 is a ledger of real estate information compiled by Fitch and Griffes, an insurance and real estate company in Schenectady, from 1870 to 1880. It has been indexed by address.

Selected Personal Papers and Business Records

Jonathan Pearson Street Books

These books of street history and land ownership information were compiled by 19th-century historian Jonathan Pearson. The books include references to deeds, sketch maps of streets, and other information.

James Frost Papers

Collects the papers of James Frost (1783-1851), a surveyor who worked in Albany, Schenectady, Montgomery, and Schoharie counties. James Frost worked mostly near the Duanesburg area. The papers include copies of survey sketches and notes, maps, and other materials related to Frost's work.

Lewis Sebring Field Books

Collects 91 field books of surveyor and civil engineer Lewis Sebring (1868-1950). There is a ledger index to the field books. The information in the field books can be challenging to make use of, as most of the information consists of short notations. Sketches indicate distances and may occasionally include nearby property owners' names, roads, bodies of water, or other landmarks.

Selected Local Resources

Schenectady County Clerk's Office

Major resource for researching deeds and mortgages. The County Clerk's Office also has a collection of maps that might be useful.
Schenectady County Office Building (3rd Floor), 620 State Street, Schenectady, NY 12305.
Phone: 518-388-4220
County Clerk Email Address: john.woodward@schenectadycounty.com

Schenectady County Surrogate's Court

Source for wills, probate records, letters of administration, etc.
Schenectady County Judicial Building, 612 State Street, Schenectady NY 12305
Phone: 518-285-8455

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation - Survey & Evaluation Unit

Peebles Island Resource Center, Waterford, NY
Resource for viewing Building/Structure Inventory Forms. An appointment is necessary.
For more information, contact Tony Opalka at 518-237-8643 ext. 3278.

Selected Online Resources

www.cyndislist.com/houses
Cyndi's List – House and Building Histories
A collection of links to house history research guides and resources online.

www.nps.gov/nr/research
National Register of Historic Places
Includes a searchable database of locations on the National Register of Historic Places. The website of the National Register of Historic Places (www.nps.gov/history/nr/) also includes information about how to list a property on the National Register and publications that offer suggestions for conducting research on a historic property.

http://nysparks.com/shpo/online-tools/default.aspx
New York State Historic Preservation Office Online Tools
This page offers access to three useful online tools:
SPHINX (State Preservation Historical Information Network Exchange) - Survey data on more than 250,000 properties in the state.
Document Imaging for National Register - Scanned images of New York's nomination documents and other related materials for the National Register of Historic Places.
Geographic Information System for Archeology and National Register - Map depicting the approximate boundaries of each of the New York's State and National Register properties and districts. A second overlay depicts the general boundary of the state's known archeological areas.

www.familysearch.org
Family Search – Genealogical website operated by the LDS Church
Offers free, searchable digital access to the Federal and New York State Censuses, along with many other resources useful in genealogical and biographical research.

www.schenectadycounty.com/MenuItemList.aspx?m=42
Schenectady County Real Property Tax Service Agency (or find via Google search)
This site is very helpful in giving information about a property and getting started with deed research.
To use the site to begin researching the chain of ownership of a property:
At the left side of the screen, click on "ImageMate Online."
At the bottom of the screen, click on access from a non-County network computer.
Enter the number and street/route name in the form and click "Search."
You will be taken to a screen with information about the property. On the left side of the screen, click on "View parcel history data."
If there are recent sales of the property, they will be listed here. For more information, click "property record card" at the bottom of the screen.
This will bring you to a scanned card showing transactions regarding the property. The most recent owner will be listed at the bottom of the card. The card shows dates that the property changed hands and gives the book ("Liber") and page on which the appropriate deeds can be found at the Schenectady County Clerk's Office.

Selected Online Resources - Newspapers

Newspapers are a useful source for real estate transactions, auction notices, or can help you find names of residents at an address during a particular time period.

http://historicnewspapers.guilpl.org
Guilderland Public Library Historic Newspapers
Offers free, searchable digital access to *Knowersville Enterprise* and *Altamont Enterprise* newspapers, 1884-2008.

www.fultonhistory.com
"Old Fulton Post Cards" Newspaper Archive
Offers free, searchable digital access to a number of New York State newspapers.

The site currently includes the following local newspapers (please note that new titles are added to the site periodically):

Schenectady County
Schenectady Cabinet - 1820-1858
Schenectady Reflector & Democrat - 1841- 1843
Schenectady Evening Star & Times - 1861-1869
Quaker Street Review - 1891-1913
Schenectady Gazette - 1911-1970
Alplaus Home Town News - 1942-1945

Albany County
Albany Evening Journal - 1830-1936
Albany Evening News - 1926-1937
Knickerbocker News - 1937-1969

Montgomery County
Amsterdam Evening Recorder - 1884-1974

Schoharie County
Schoharie Patriot - 1860-1863
Schoharie Republican - 1925-1939
Schoharie Union - 1864-1882

Rensselaer County
Troy Budget - 1834-1854
Troy Daily Times - 1851-1920
Troy Times Record - 1935-1973
Troy Times - 1921-1934
Troy Daily Post - 1847-1851
Troy Daily Whig - 1834-1873