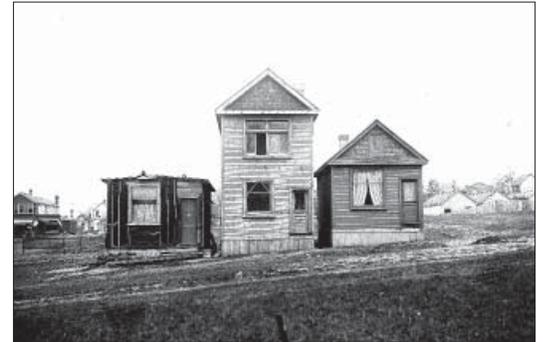


Researching Your House

Interested in when your house was built? Curious about who owned your home before you, or what was on the land a century ago? The City of Toronto Archives contains many sources that can help you answer these questions. This guide explains the best sources for such research, how you use them, and what kind of information you can expect to find.

Researching a property can be like assembling a jigsaw puzzle—one with missing pieces, as well as pieces that belong to another puzzle! Be patient. Assemble information before you come to any conclusions. Cross-reference information from a variety of sources. Be aware that not all sources are 100% accurate! When recording information, always write down the source, title, page number, microfilm reel number, or any other available references that will allow you to find the information again, if necessary.

If you have any questions or difficulties finding information, please feel free to ask the Reference Desk staff for help.

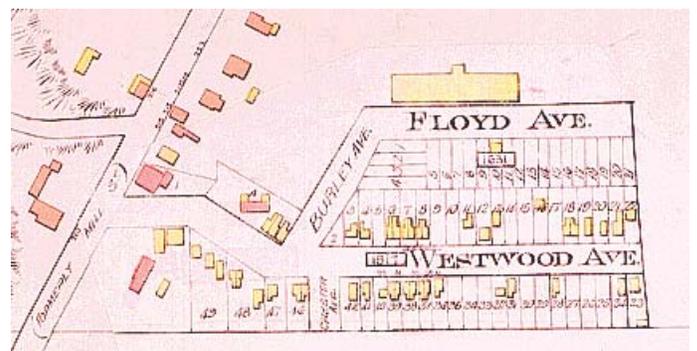


Coxwell Avenue, 1912, photograph by Arthur Goss, Series 372, Subseries 18, Item 5

Fire insurance plans

Fire insurance plans provide detailed information about buildings and neighbourhoods. They can be used to determine when a building was built or demolished, details of building materials, position of building on lot, lot and address numbers, and lot sizes and shapes. The fire insurance plans are useful in determining previous street names and numbers, so we recommend you start your research by looking at them.

The Archives has fire insurance plans for a variety of years. The earliest is the Boulton Atlas of 1858. Most of the plans cover various years from 1880 to 1924, although there are a few covering mostly industrial and commercial areas of the former city up to the 1940s. There is a multi-volume set covering from 1954 to 1973.



This selection from a fire insurance map shows what were at the time new suburbs in the former East York. The darker buildings (pink in the original) are brick, while the lighter ones (yellow in the original) are wooden. Note that the numbers shown are lot numbers, and do not match street numbering. Goad's Atlas of the City of Toronto and Suburbs, 1910 revised to 1912, Vol. 1 plate 35

Not all areas of the city are covered for all years; particularly, the earlier plans cover mostly what is now the downtown central city, while the later ones branch out into suburban areas.

The easiest way to view the fire insurance plans in their original colours from 1880 to 1924 is to use the clickable key plans on the Archives' website. Later fire insurance plans can be viewed

on microfilm (black and white only). A key to the symbols used in the maps can be found in the Microfilm Room. The Boulton Atlas is available in hard copy only, in the Research Hall.

For more details on how to use the fire insurance plans, please see Research Guide #11, "Using Fire Insurance Plans."

Assessment rolls

Assessment rolls, created for property tax collection, contain some or all of the following information: the name, occupation, salary, and religion of the "head of household" (usually male, although women appear when widowed or single), and the description, ownership, and assessed value of the property. Assessment rolls were created for every year.

Assessment rolls are organized by the municipality a property was part of at the time the assessment was made. The map *City of Toronto Annexations* on the Archives' website, and the maps of municipal boundaries in the microfilm room, will help you identify the correct municipi-

ality. Post-1998 assessment rolls are also organized by the six pre-1998 municipalities.

To use the assessment rolls, find the research guide binder to the assessment rolls for your former municipality. The guide will show you how to identify and order assessment rolls, and how to find information about your property in the assessment rolls.

For current assessment information about your property, please see the Toronto Property System database, available in the Research Hall. Please feel free to ask Reference Desk staff for help in using this database.

ASSESSMENT ROLL FOR WARD No. 6,							CITY OF TORONTO, 1894.																			
NAMES OF TAXABLE PARTIES.							AND VALUE OF REAL AND PERSONAL PROPERTY OR INCOME.																			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	LAND		8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22			
NO.	OCCUPANT	OCCUPATION	M.F.	R. or C.	REL.	AGE	OWNERS	Street	Lot	LAND	Value of Land	Value of Improvements	Value of Real Estate, or Real Property, as Assessed.	Value of Personal Property, as Assessed.	Value of Personal Property, as Assessed, less Exemptions.	No. of Children under 16 Years of Age.	No. of Children under 16 Years of Age, as of 1st Jan. 1894.	No. of Children under 16 Years of Age, as of 1st Jan. 1893.	No. of Children under 16 Years of Age, as of 1st Jan. 1892.	No. of Children under 16 Years of Age, as of 1st Jan. 1891.	No. of Children under 16 Years of Age, as of 1st Jan. 1890.	No. of Children under 16 Years of Age, as of 1st Jan. 1889.	No. of Children under 16 Years of Age, as of 1st Jan. 1888.	No. of Children under 16 Years of Age, as of 1st Jan. 1887.		
								or Lot No.	or Lot No.																	
340	Northern Place West Side Paul Emb.																									
341	Scott Walter & Robert	Labourer	M			28	John Marshall			3	276	208	476		376	3										
342	Jeffrey Thomas & Robert	Labourer	M			31	Thomas Jeffrey			5	200	320	520		480	6	3	1	8	6						
343	Vacant Lot						William J. Stone			6	400		400		400											

Assessment rolls give a wealth of information about Toronto citizens. Here, we see that labourer Thomas Jeffrey, aged 31, of 6 Northern Place, owned his house ("F" stands for "freeholder," or owner). There were six people in the family, and their religion was Anglican ("E" stands for "Church of England"). The Jeffreys' neighbours, Scott Walter and his small family, rented their house and were Methodists ("M"). The land on the other side of the Jefferys was a vacant lot that had not yet been assigned a street number. Series 612, 1894

City directories

City directories give the name and occupation of the "head of the household" (usually male, although women appear when widowed or single) at a given address. By finding the first year your home appears in the city directories, you can arrive at a probable date of construction. By then working forward, you can compile a list of property owners and/or tenants.

In most city directories, street names and family surnames are listed in separate sections of each directory, in alphabetical order. Some early directories have either street names or family surnames, but not both. Many directories also include a list of businesses by type. Abbreviations used in the directories are explained in an index near the front of each directory.

The earliest directories contain information on only the original City of Toronto. Starting in 1873, outlying "suburban" (now urban) areas, such as Parkdale, are listed in appendices. Beginning in 1930, suburban areas are part of the main listings. After 1983, the directories are published in separate "central," "east," and "west" volumes, though not every volume is published in every year. Information in a directory is gathered the year before the directory's date (i.e., the 1910 directory shows information gathered in 1909).

The Archives has directories for every year from 1834 to 2001, with the exception of a few years in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, and in 1987, when directories were not published. Directories are available on microfilm in the Research Hall.

This directory entry reveals details about Toronto citizens' lives. For example, Lotty Brown, a paper maker, was a boarder at 131 Jarvis Street. Mary Brown, widow of Thomas, owned a house ("h") on St. Charles Street. This entry illustrates the complications that arise with common names, as well as an intriguing number of occupations held by women. The Toronto City Directory 1884

BEL	STREET DIRECTORY.	BEL
m	Bellevue Place runs	5 Kinsella R
r	west from Grosvenor ave.	Vacant lot
7	first north of St. Pat-	13 O'Brien M
ids	rick, St. Patrick Ward.	15 Prout Joh
	NORTH SIDE.	17 Kacheen T
st. intersects.	Private grounds	19 Brennan J:
	<i>Bellevue ave. commences.</i>	21 Prince Joh
	House, s e	23 Vacant
's school	4 Hill W R	Vacant lot
by A J	6 Donkin John	
Church	8 Rogers John	Vacant lot
	10 Lamdell Daniel	29 Jolley Mrs
	12 Eckstein George	31 St Mathias
cis	14 Sintzenich H H	Vacant lot
by A F	Vacant lots	
J	20 Callis Edward, grocer	Vacant lot
M	<i>Leonard ave. commences.</i>	47 Oswin Jam
	House, s e	49 McNaught
	Private grounds	51 Stoneham
urvey bldrs	28 Drew Matthew	53 Baker Arn
jr	30 Ferriman Albert	55 Stamford l
ids	SOUTH SIDE.	57 Evans Geo
A	Private grounds	59 Shelton Th
ids	<i>Denison ave. ends.</i>	61 Sullivan Jc
	5 Peterkin C R	Vacant lot
	7 Wallace John	65 Beggins W
	9 Waterhouse Benjamin	67 Atkins Fre
	11 Gourlie Wm	69 Stallard A
	13 Dack Wm	71 Stokes Rol

This directory entry shows only the "head of household" (usually male) at an address, rather than all members of a family. Later directories list the head of household's occupation as well. You can use the intersecting streets (here in italics) to find your property, even if the street numbers have changed since the year the directory was published. The Toronto City Directory 1884

Brown Mrs Kate, cook American Hotel, h
47 Wellington e.
Brown Miss Lotty A, paper mkr, bds 131
Jarvis.
Brown Louis, clk, bds 106 Shuter.
Brown Louisa (wid John), bds 44 Alice.
Brown Louisa, domestic 127 Bathurst.
Brown Mary (wid Charles), bds 77 McGill.
Brown Mary (wid Charles), h 55 Peter.
Brown Mary (wid James F), h 789 Queen
west.
Brown Mary (wid Thomas), h 4 St Charles.
Brown Miss Mary, bookfolder, bds 17 Shaw.
Brown Miss Mary, dressmkr, bds 383 Ger-
rard e.
Brown Miss Mary, clk W M Milligan, bds 8
Baldwin.

To see building permit information for Toronto after 1970 or for other former municipalities, contact Toronto Building:

South District (former Toronto and East York): 416-392-7974

North District (former North York): 416-395-7525

East District (former Scarborough): 416-396-7526

West District (former Etobioke and York): 416-394-2414

In this example from the 1907 building permit index, J. Somers has been issued building permit 6206. You must look at the building permit itself to find Somers' address. Note that while all the names here begin with the same letter, they are not arranged alphabetically within the letter. Series 1186, Subseries 2, Item 4

BUILDING PERMIT INDEX		
OWNER'S NAME	STREET	PERMIT NO.
Somers J.		6206
Strattonburg E.C.		6212
Smith Mrs L.		6235
Schaefer Zadek Nelson Craig		6237
Smith David		6248 9303
Sharp Samuel		6251
Stanley F.		6262 7896 7933
Steeley W.G.		6268
Sellers S.P.G.		6282
Simms F.R.		6303
Stewart Alex M.		6325
Spicer Robt M.		6329
Sanders H.F.		6366 9332

Street name and number changes

The address you live at now may not be the address your house had in the past. It can be useful to determine whether and when your street name and address number changed. Be sure to keep in mind the changes and when they occurred when looking up names and dates in the archival sources listed in this guide.

The fire insurance plans are useful in determining previous street names and numbers, so we recommend you start your research by looking at them.

To check whether and when your street name has changed, you may also look up your street name in the "street names" binder for your former municipality. (For the former City of Toronto only, there is also a "street renumbering guide" binder.)



When the land around Roncesvalles Avenue was originally subdivided into building lots, Pearson Avenue was named Wolseley Avenue. It was renamed in 1884, possibly by a new land developer. 148 Pearson Avenue, Series 372, Subseries 3, Item 638.

Aerial photographs

These photographs, taken from planes, are close enough to the ground that you can see buildings appearing, disappearing, and changing over the years. You can also distinguish geographic forms (such as rivers that seem to vanish, indicating that they have been channelled into sewers), and neighbourhood features such as parks, roads, etc.

Each aerial shows a part of the city, not the entire city.

The aerials cover the current City of Toronto for most years from 1947 to 1992, with a smaller, incomplete group dating from 1937 to 1942. Aerials from 1937 to 1947 are available on

This aerial photograph shows apartment buildings and single-family houses beside a cloverleaf highway interchange. You can use a standard map to identify major roads and landmarks in order to find your property. Fonds 37, Series 12, Item 1960-172

the Archives' website. Aerials from 1950 to 1992 are available on computers in the Research Hall. On the computer desktop, click on the shortcut named "Series 12 Aerial Photographs - Year Index" and use the clickable annual indexes.



Council proceedings

Since a municipality is responsible for providing public services such as sidewalks, water mains, sewers, etc., the proceedings of municipal councils can reveal the services available at a given time, and thus the lifestyle of an area's residents.

Proceedings can also give clues to events or issues of neighbourhood importance. Council proceedings include council minutes, reports to council, and bylaws.

Proceedings for all former municipalities are available in hard copy. To find them, search

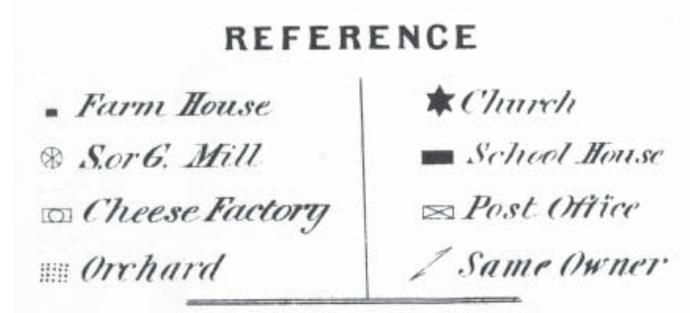
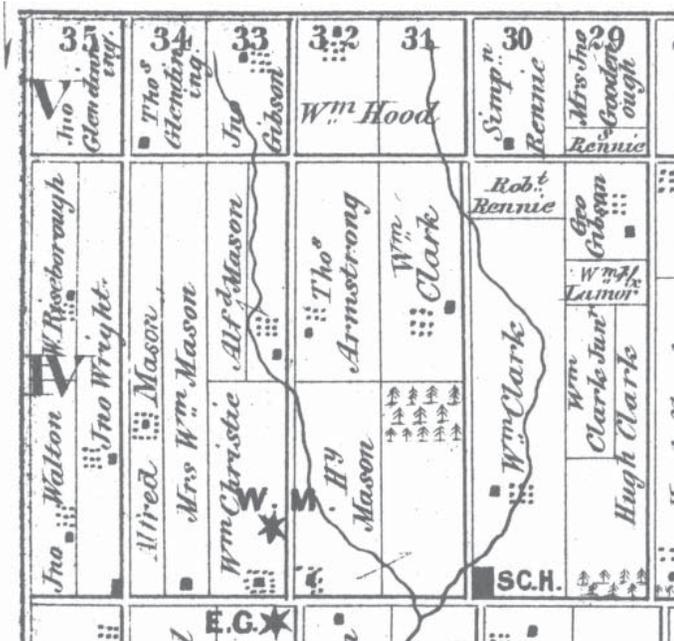
for your former municipality in the WebGencat database. Please feel free to ask Reference Desk staff for assistance.

Council proceedings for the current City of Toronto are available on the city's website: <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis>

A bylaw search function and some bylaws, including those for former municipalities, are available on the City of Toronto's online Bylaw Status Register: <http://www.toronto.ca/leg-docs/bylaws>

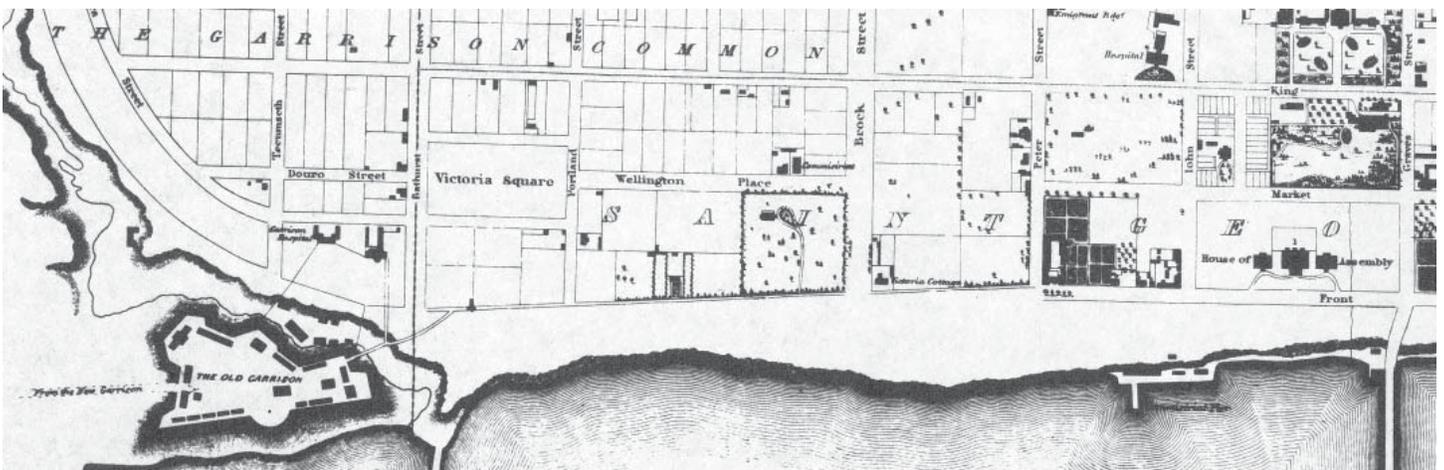
Maps and atlases

Early atlases often show landowners' names, lot layout, lot and concession numbers, and other information. Many maps are available on the Archives' website. Others can be found by searching the WebGencat database. Please feel free to ask Reference Desk staff for help in finding maps.



Left and above: Maps sometimes show the names of land owners. In the 1790s, the government divided land into 100-acre parcels and gave each a concession number (the Roman numerals) and a lot number (the Arabic numerals). Concession and lot numbers are still used today to legally identify plots of land. Reference marks show important features of a community. Atlas of York County, 1878

Below: Detail of Topographical Map of the City and Liberties of Toronto, Cane, 1842, MT 255

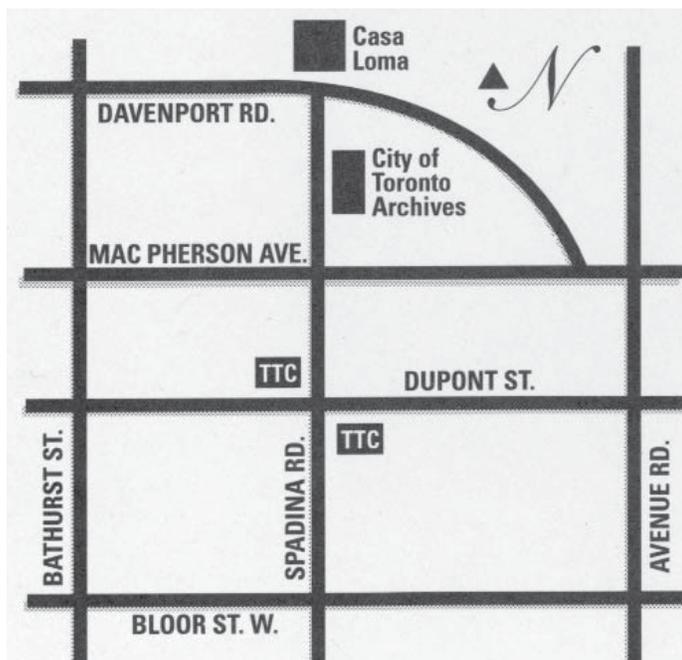


Photographs and other records

The Archives *may* have photographs of your street or your house. To find them, use the WebGencat database, available on the Archives' website. In the Advanced search screen, enter your street's name as a keyword. If you click the "Scanned photographs only" box, the search results will only include photographs you can see online. If you do not click the "Scanned photographs only" box, the search results will include all records with that search term, including scanned photographs that you can see online, unscanned photographs that you must request to see at the Archives, and other records such as reports, maps, building plans, subject files, etc.



"Smallest House," ca. 1913, Photographer: William James, Fonds 1244, Item 82.14



The City of Toronto Archives is easy to get to by public transit. Exit the University subway line at Dupont station and walk north.

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fax: 416-392-9685
website: toronto.ca/archives

9:00-4:30 Monday to Friday
10:00-4:30 Saturdays (October to April)
Closed Sundays, plus Saturdays of holiday long weekends throughout the year

Our archival heritage is unique and irreplaceable. Please help us preserve it for future researchers by using only pencil when taking notes and wearing cotton gloves when handling photographs. Please do not remove any archival materials from the Research Hall. Thank you for your consideration!

The City of Toronto Archives is a program of the City Clerk's Office. September 2012.