

How to Use Local Architecture as a Learning Tool

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Houses have history! While each house has a different history, and the sources that you use to find that history vary greatly, there are still certain standard questions to ask. And while it's exciting to find answers, we learn more if we keep asking new questions:

1. Styles

What styles exist in your town?

Do homes follow the style? Do they differ consistently?

Is there a pattern? (i.e., age, neighborhood, architects, etc.)

What do the home styles tell you about how people lived?

Are there maid's quarters? A second plain stairway? A rug porch?

Was there a front porch? How big was it?

What were the original uses of the rooms? Was there a parlor or formal dining room? A grand entryway? A sleeping porch?

What do alterations tell you about how the needs and values of the occupants changed?

2. Architects & Contractors

Who was this person? Where were they from? Where did they study? Who did they train under?

What other buildings did this architect build? Where are the bricks or fixtures from?

3. Owners

Who built the home? How did they earn the money to build it?

Who has owned it since? What was the significance of their lives?'

4. Neighborhoods

Who platted and first developed the neighborhood?

Was it a planned development? Were any homes built on the same pattern?

Did the neighborhood develop all at once, or over time? Does it have a name?

Where were the neighborhood businesses located? What was the popular transportation?

What were the original churches, synagogues, other religious buildings? Social centers?

What was the original ethnic character of the neighborhood? How has it changed?

How much of the neighborhood has become rental property?

5. Action Plans

Which buildings still have architectural integrity? Which buildings have a significant history? Which buildings or groups of buildings should be on the National Register of Historic Places? Which buildings should be preserved?

Standard Research Sources:

City directories, pioneer histories, published histories, library collections, museum collections, microfilmed newspapers, state archives, college and university archives.