



Tips for Researching a Lower Swatara Township Property

- **Look closely at your home's physical structure.** Exposed rafters in the attic and bricks in the basement can tell you a lot about how old your house might be. You might find dates or stamps left by the builder; different-sized bricks will tell you that the house was built in different construction cycles.

Tip: Closets are great places to uncover clues like old wallpaper or paint -- certain paper patterns or color-schemes can be traced back to a popular period style.

- **Be your own archaeologist.** Scope out your backyard the next time you're in the yard, especially after spring rains, and look carefully at buried treasure you might find, like old glass bottles or children's toys. Items like that can tell you a lot about who lived in the house and when.
- **Know a metal detector?** They can help "dig up" some history that may pertain to your house. We can get you in touch with one, just give us a call or send an email.
- **Identify the architectural style of your home.** Example: Victorian (1837-1901) homes may have slate roofs, stain glass windows, sash windows that go up and down, patterns in the brickwork, bay windows bumped out on the side with window seats on the inside, fancy gingerbread porches and railings, oak or walnut trim on the inside, and/or fireplaces. Look at www.antiquehomestyle.com for help determining a particular style. Or any book on the subject, one to try is

Identifying American Architecture – A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms, 1600-1945 by John J.-G. Blumenson.

- **Talk to people.** Talk to the past owners, your neighbors, local business owners, even the mailman. They might be able to tell you who lived in the house before you and remember if any changes have been made to it over time.
- **Explore the neighborhood.** Are there other older buildings that look similar? How does your house fit in -- for example, does your house face a different way? It could have been built on land that was once a farm while the rest of your neighborhood was built later.

Tip: If you live near a city, measure the distance to the city center. The farther you are from the original core, the younger your house or property might be.

- **Learn the history of the area.** Lower Swatara Township was settled as early as the 1750's and was made an official township of its own in 1840. Did any major events take place? (For example: Was it the scene of a battle? Was it part of the underground railroad? Bootlegging history? Was your home, or any other nearby building, designed by a noted architect?) Answering these questions can offer important clues to your house's own history.
- **Check your historic district status.** If you don't already know if your house is designated as a historic structure, you can check with your Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) at www.phmc.pa.gov/Preservation.

Tip: Look for properties in your area on the National Register of Historic Places at:
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>

- **Research land and property records.** A simple deed or title search can tell you who owned the property and when, and tax records can tell you how the property has changed over time. Go

to www.dauphinpropertyinfo.org. If you have a copy of your deed, use the parcel number to search for your property. That will bring you to the property info page and sale history where you can see who owned the property back to at least 2001. To continue your search, you can go to Pennsylvania State Archives' Bureau of Land Records Overview Page. It is very useful to go to the Dauphin County Courthouse on Market Street in Harrisburg, PA. Go to the Recorder of Deeds Office there and go on their website and do a name search. (Note: when using the name search to find a grantee, you enter in the volume number first and then the volume and page – ex. 2 K 499) There is a .50 cents cost per page for copying and we suggest you park in the Blackberry Alley Parking Lot at a current rate of \$3.00. We have found this to be the most helpful source of identifying older deeds. Note: Prices listed above are subject to change at any time.

You can also check out the tax assessment office in the Dauphin County Administration Building on Second and Market Streets (right by the courthouse).

If you don't have a copy of your deed, go to <http://www.dauphincounty.org/government/Publicly-Elected-Officials/Recorder-of-Deeds> and print your deed, or you can visit the Dauphin County Courthouse at 101 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17101

- **PA State Archives.** Go to: <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Pages/default.aspx#> Under the Archives tab, go to “search on-line” and you will find many other tools that may help with the history of your property. They have old aerial maps, postcards, and other documents.
- **Look up local census data.** Census records can tell you more about the lives of previous owners, like the number of children in the house, cost of the home, whether the home had a radio, and more. Go to www.census.gov/data. Then go to American Fact Finder and put in your home address. Wills are also a great source.

Tip: Stop by your local public library and look for a city directory -- a precursor to the modern phone book -- which might offer more details on previous occupants.

- **Contact your local historical society and visit your public library.** Ask to see old photographs they might have of your house or the surrounding land, historical maps of the area, or newspapers with specific articles that reference history of Lower Swatara Township.

Special note: Remember that deeds prior to March 4, 1785, would be under Lancaster County not Dauphin County.

Sources: National Trust for Historic Preservation

www.savingplaces.org

www.statelibrary.pa.gov/GeneralPublic/Learn/Pages/Pennsylvania-House-Histories.aspx.

PA State Archives <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Pages/default.aspx#>