

Tracing the History of a House or Commercial Building in Bellingham

Finding out the history of a house or building can be a fun and intriguing process. You can find information about the people who used to live or work there. You can learn what architectural style your house represents and try to find out who the architect was, (if there was one), the builder, and the date it was built. Your research could uncover information about important people and/or events associated with the home or building.

Above all, researching the history of a house will give you an appreciation for its history and lend insight into the customs and lifestyles of your predecessors and reveal information necessary for an historic nomination, if that might be your goal. People have a variety of goals in researching historic buildings – from genealogists hunting down family information to realtors who want quality selling points, or those who may want to restore or remodel their home based on its original layout and design. The information you gather can be focused on key points required by the Washington State Office of Historic Preservation survey forms and you would be one step closer to local, state or national designation on an individual or district basis.

Local History and Migratory Patterns

Understanding the history of your house is not just about particular dates and people, it's also about historical trends and patterns. Which ethnic group settled in your area? When did they arrive? Where did they come from? What local resources were available for construction? What were the prevailing architectural trends of the time? Answering these and many other questions will provide important context before you begin compiling the specific history of your house.

- **Getting Started**

If your home is in the City of Bellingham, a first step would be to visit the Permit Center on the 1st floor of City Hall at 210 Lottie Street. Ask to see the microfiche on your address for building permits issued from the mid 1970s to the present. Their hours of operation are M-F 9-12 and 2 -4. There are usually permits on file here that show permits for remodeling, etc. These permits give names and dates of more recent renovations to older homes. There are two microfiche viewers and only one that prints for 25 cents per page.