

HISTORIC RESEARCH MAIN STREET IOWA TECHNOTES

Information about the history and development of a building can not only be very interesting, but useful as well. People who have played a part in the history of the community (or even the state or country) often have very close ties to commercial properties.

Historical information can be found from many sources, in many forms. Knowledge of these sources and how to access them is critical in an efficient property research project. Sources of information are available locally and from state sources. Often it is easiest to begin the search close to home.

Many local sources can provide valuable information. The local historical society will likely have a variety of photos of the downtown during various periods. Previous owners may be able to provide photos and other personal information. City Hall and the Courthouse will be able to provide tax records and information regarding the various owners over time. Be sure to look at the local library for current and historic maps and photos and any old newspaper stories that might talk about the building. The library might also have a collection of City Directories that will list the type of business housed on the site, the business owner and possibly even tenants.

Besides local sources one of the first places to look for historic

information is the State Historical Society. It is possible that some research on your property has already been conducted and is on file. The State Historical Society can supply you with copies of any information they may already have, if requested. They can provide you with additional sources of information you may want to access.

The State Historical Society can also assist in efforts to place a building or structure on the National Register of Historic Places. Such a listing provides the owner with a number of incentives, like tax credits, low-interest loans and possibly matching grants, that can be utilized in the rehabilitation of an historic property. In order to be listed on the Register, an application supplied by the State Historical Society must be completed and reviewed at both the state and federal levels.

The following questions will help in the research of an older property and may provide insight where to seek additional information about the building. They should also help determine the specific information that will be important for a particular property.

Site

What are the overall property boundaries? How many structures/

buildings exist on the property?

Builder/Owner

Who originally built the building? What year? Is this builder/owner important to local, regional, state or national history? How?

Has there been an owner (other than the original) who has local, regional, state or national importance? If so, when did they own the property? What was the property called during the period of ownership of this person?

Architecture

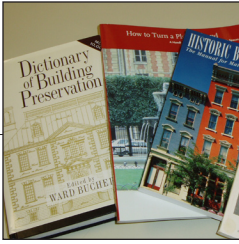
Who was the building's architect? Are there other properties in the area designed by this person? Of what importance was this

designer? Is the building a unique or excellent example of this architect's work? Is the building an excellent example of a particular architectural style? What style? Is the building a unique design for this type of building or structure? How?

Craftsmanship

Who was the building's contractor/craftsman? Did they play an instrumental role in local, state, regional or national history? Are there specific, unique examples of excellent craftsmanship or building/construction techniques used on this property? Are the materials used in construction unique or unusual for this type of structure? Is the way these materials are used unique or

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unusual? How? Is the type of construction method or process unique because of materials, structural system or technique?

Context

Are there any special circumstances related to the construction of the building and the overall development and history of the community? Is there any special relationship between this building and other buildings in the immediate vicinity that add to its historic value and somehow connects them together?

Events and Activities

Are there any special events or activities that have occurred on this property? What events, and when did they occur? Is the property somehow tied to the life of an important historical figure? How?

Integrity

Have there been any changes or additions to the original structure? When were these made? Have they significantly changed the appearance and integrity of the building? Do any of the changes or alterations have importance of their own? If so, what? What is the existing condition of the property? Are major structural and ornamental features severely deteriorated or missing? Are there any imminent threats to the building or its environment?

All of these questions may not

pertain to every building. However, it is important to realize the variety of information that can be important in the history of a property, and that information and history may also be shared with a number of buildings in the same community.

This shared history will become evident as the research progresses on a building, or a group of buildings. Relationships will begin to come into focus that show how different buildings might be related to each other and to the overall history of the community, state or country. This relationship might hinge on special events or activities in the town or region, like an economic boom or bust, or a natural or man made disaster, like a fire or tornado. Other themes, like type of materials or the craftsmen who built the buildings, could also unite a group of structures as an overall unit or district.

Historical information can be useful for many local revitalization efforts. Increased awareness of the vital role a building or group of buildings has played in the community's history helps build value for the property on a local level. This information can also be used in local tourism efforts, including walking tours and brochures. Furthermore, the information may be useful for

business marketing efforts. Local historical groups may find the information valuable as well, for projects like a compilation of local history, special historical displays or for special events like centennials or class reunions.

A complete building history is not only useful for its intrinsic value, but it can have a real value as well. A well documented building that is shown to have a major role in history generally has increased market value upon resale. Additionally, the documentation also provides a concise history of the care and ownership of the structure that can be passed on and added to by future owners.

For more information:

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Additional Reading:

*National Register Bulletin #39
"Researching a Historic Property" U.S.
Department of the Interior
National Park Service*

*National Register Bulletin #16 "Guidelines for Completing the
National Register of Historic
Places Forms"*

*U.S. Department of the Interior, National
Park Service.*

*National Register Bulletin #16A "How to
Complete the National
Register Registration Form"
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service.*

“Historical information about buildings can be used in tourism efforts, business marketing efforts and in special local history projects.”