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Building History Resource Guide

The Georgia Historical Society (GHS) Research Center holds a vast collection of material useful to those researching a building's history. If a building is located in the Historic District or select nearby neighborhoods, it is helpful to first learn the building's lot number and ward name in addition to its street address. Ward Notebooks, City Directories, and *Historic Savannah* are most commonly used to locate this information.

This is a non-exhaustive list of building history resources at GHS designed to serve as an introduction. Keep in mind that information can be found in many other places. For specific titles, shelf locations, and additional resources, ask a reference staff member or search our Research Center catalogs at www.georgiahistory.com.

Vertical Files: Biography and Genealogy files may have information about owners, residents, builders, or architects. General Subject files may have newspaper articles, pamphlets, research notes, etc. about a building. Search the General Subject files index for Architecture, Buildings (by address), Business Enterprises, Churches, Neighborhoods, Public Buildings, Streets, etc.

Historic Savannah: This book provides the construction date, original owner's name, photo, and, occasionally, the builder or architect's name, of many buildings in the Historic District and some nearby neighborhoods. It is indexed by address and indicates the ward where a building is located (three editions, photographs are sometimes different in each edition).

Ward Notebooks: Photocopies of research notes by Mary Lane Morrison used in creating *Historic Savannah*. Organized by ward and lot covering the downtown Historic District and some neighborhoods such as Ardsley Park. They list owners and improvements of select buildings, as well as newspaper article citations and other information. The original Ward Notebooks are located in the *Mary Lane Morrison Research Materials (MS 1320)* archival collection.

City Directories: Savannah City Directories are available in hardcopy and microfiche for most years from 1848 to 2003 with digital copies available online through Ancestry.com for many years from 1866 to 1960. GHS subscribes to Ancestry.com and is accessible from the Research Center computer stations. Beginning in 1889 a street index is included in city directories, allowing you to look up the occupant of a certain address. Information can include names of heads of households or businesses, name of spouse, occupation, and work and home address. Early city directories are also available on microfiche for Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, and Charleston, SC.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: Holdings include 1884, 1888, 1898 with paste-ins to 1916, 1916 with paste-ins to 1954, and 1954 with paste-ins to 1973. They show building footprints and construction materials and can help track a property's development or determine a location or the nature of its surroundings. Available in hardcopy, online, or microfilm (depending on year).

Sanborn Maps for the years 1884-1922 are online at the Digital Library of Georgia.

Maps: The *1953 City of Savannah Map* shows ward and lot numbers (located behind the William Hodgson portrait at the rear of the Reading Room). Other maps, including the *1853 Vincent Map*, are in the *Charles Ellis and Elizabeth Stewart Waring Papers (MS 1018)* collection. The Waring Maps are available in the Reading Room (in the large flat map file cabinets) and consist of three volumes of map reproductions charting Savannah's progress from 1770-1903. Also search the Research Center Catalog (Advanced Search, Subject=Maps) for over 800 individually cataloged maps.

Architect/Builder/Craftsman Lists: Citations of newspaper articles that feature some architects, builders, and craftsmen. In binders near the Ward Notebooks.

Municipal Reports (1856-1923): May provide data about when a property received electricity, sewer, paving, or other city services. Mayor's reports are online at the Digital Library of Georgia.

Savannah Newspapers: Find information about people, businesses, organizations, or prominent buildings. GHS holds newspapers on microfilm 1763-present, bound indexes for 1763-1844, 1850-91, and 1929-1985, and microfilm indexes for 1891-1895. *There are no indexes for 1845-1849 and September 1895-May 1929.*

Miscellaneous Items: Various plans, surveys, reports, and regulations of Savannah and surrounding areas may include information on buildings outside of the Historic District.

Archival Collections: Contain original material such as personal papers, photographs, maps, and architectural drawings. Search the Archival Collections Finding Aids Database to find additional collections relevant to your research.

- The Walter Hartridge Collection (MS 1349): Research notes compiled by local historian Walter C. Hartridge. Includes notes on Savannah buildings, some of which have been demolished, and some photographs.
- MS 1360 and MS 1361: Two of the largest photo collections at GHS. The *Cordray-Foltz Collection (MS 1360)* has images from the Cordray and Foltz Photography Studios in Savannah, ca. 1890-1960 (also in the Digital Image Catalog). The *GHS Photograph Collection (MS 1361-PH)* includes images from various sources. Finding aids are arranged by subject and include, street views, buildings, events, people, etc.
- Robert L. Heriot Photo Collection (MS 1371): Includes many images of streets, buildings, businesses, events, and aerial views of Savannah, 1908-1986; mostly 1950-1986.
- Edward Girard Photo Collection (MS 1374): Savannah area photos, 1905-1952.
- Van Jones Martin Photographs (MS 1376): Photos taken from 1974-1983 for publications about architecture in Savannah. Identified by building address.
- Historic Savannah Foundation Collection (MS 1509): Architectural drawings and records, the foundation was a primary force in preserving Savannah buildings. For *additional architectural drawings*, search the Archival Collections Finding Aids Database for "architectural drawings", the name of the architect/owner/building, or the address.

- Lawyers Title Insurance Corporation Records (MS 1599): Covers the years 1922-1979; consists of title insurance policy files. A policy may include property reports, blueprints, notes on the condition of the property, and various other property or owner information. *There are a variety of ways to find information with this collection. Please consult with reference staff to determine which look-up method will work best for you.*
 - Properties in the City of Savannah: First, locate the property in the *Lot and Block Atlas of Savannah, Georgia* map book (stored in the large flat map file cabinets). Alternately, if the property owner's name is already known, researchers can use the *Name Index Cards* (request from archival storage). The map book is arranged by ward and only covers Savannah. If there is a handwritten number on a particular property in the map book, there is a policy for it (if no handwritten number, there is no policy). Next, look up the handwritten number in the *Property Index Cards* (located beside the metal microfilm cabinets at the rear of the Reading Room). Locate the correct numerical section of the cards and find the card corresponding to the handwritten number from the property map. Note the title insurance policy number on the card. Then, consult the collection finding aid (on top of the file cabinet or online) to determine in which archival box the policy is stored.
 - Properties outside of the City of Savannah: Use the *Name Index Cards* (request from archival storage). Cards are arranged alphabetically by surname and cover properties in Chatham County (including Savannah) and many other surrounding counties. Note the title insurance policy number on the card and then consult the collection finding aid to determine in which archival box the policy is stored.
- Midtown Savannah Photo Collection (MS 1686): Photos of midtown, 1950-1960s.
- City of Savannah Tax Assessment Records (MS 5600-90): On microfilm; 1854-1912 with some gaps.