

PROVIDENCE PRESERVATION SOCIETY
RESEARCH PROCEDURES

- I. Begin in the City Tax Assessor's Office, Providence City Hall.
 - A. Convert street address into Plat and Lot numbers using the computer print-out books on the counter. Also note the current owner and his/her address.
 - B. Copy all entries relating to that plat and lot number given on the plat cards located behind the counter.
 - C. Copy related deed book and page citations from the Field Cards located opposite counter. Be sure to review both sets: pre-1949 and after 1949. These references will give you a head start when you begin to run down the deed chain. The references on them will go back as far as the 1880's for some properties.
 - D. Trace the Tax Assessor's Plat Map. This will show the property as it is defined currently and will serve mainly as a reference tool for you during your research. Be sure to include the dimensions and square footage of the parcel, the lot numbers of nearby lots, compass directions and distances to nearest street corners (Property will often be described as "beginning 336' from the corner of..."). Don't forget to label the streets.

- II. Next trace the property City Atlases located in the City Archives on the 5th floor.
 - A. Locate the property on each atlas beginning with the most recent and working back in time. (1937, 1926, 1918, 1908, 1895, 1882 and 1875. If the structure still shows on the 1875 atlas then check the 1857 Walling Map.) Trace the map or make notes of the information they contain which ever seems most appropriate.
 - B. Be sure to make note of any references given on the atlases - especially citations for plat maps.
 - C. A complete run down of the atlases will allow you to bracket the most likely date that the structure was built. For example if the structure appears on the 1895 Atlas but not the 1882 a preliminary date between 1882 and 1895 would be suggested. This bracket date will help determine how far back to carry the deed chain and also define the scope of the later review of City Directories.

- III. Now go to the Recorder of Deeds Office and trace the land evidence record for the property.
 - A. Begin by reading the deeds identified by the deed book and page citations you found on the Tax Assessor's Field Cards.
 - B. As you work back into the 19th century the deeds themselves may give the previous deed citation. If not you will have to generate the citations yourself from the Grantor/Grantee Indices.

- C. Read each document carefully and completely fill out a white sheet for each document consulted. Be sure you read every document for which you have a citation.
- D. Make a tracing of any relevant Plat Maps that are cited in deeds or were referred to in the Atlases.
- E. Carefully record (direct quotation is probably the best) any references to buildings and/or improvements that exist on the property.
- F. Trace the deed chain back until you are completely sure that the structure no longer exists. A basic guide here is the bracket date you established with the City Atlases, but only experience will give you confidence and even then you may have to return to the deeds after you turn up other information.
- G. Check to see that your deed chain is complete and continuous. On a large table lay your white sheets out in chronological order. Is the Grantor for any given deed also the Grantee for the immediately previous deed? If not, why not? Did you miss a transfer in your review of the land evidence or was the property transferred by a will or probate proceeding?

IV. From the Records of the Probate Court fill in Probate Records in at least the following cases:

- A. To explain any gaps in the chain of title that were revealed by the review process in step 3G.
- B. For any owner who died while still holding title to the property.
- C. You may need to consult the Vital Records while you do this for the names of parents and other relatives. Property inherited by a wife from her own family can be especially difficult to trace. Remember that the Rhode Island Vital Records record only events that occurred in Rhode Island, likewise with local vital statistics. (Births, deaths & marriages.) Also note that for early records there may not have been any mandatory reporting of those events.
- D. While Probate Records are most complete for those persons who died in that particular town they may also contain some information relating to the disposition of estates within the town that were owned by non-residents. (Look for the key words like “trustee”, “assignee”, and “devisee” and be sure to check the Grantor/ee Indices under the names of relatives.
- E. Completely fill out one blue sheet for each Probate Case consulted. (ie. for each individual deceased).

- V. Completely run down the City Directories and/or the House Directories for the building. Begin with the date the present owner purchased the building. List all the residents except in the case of lodging houses etc. where the list would become prohibitively long.
- A. Use the House Directories as far back as possible. (1893)
 - B. Prior to 1893 use the City Directory as follows:
 - 1. Follow the last known occupant from the House Directories back as far as possible.
 - 2. Once that person no longer lives there switch to the name of the contemporary owner (established by the deed chain). If that person is the occupant continue follow him/her. If not...all you can say is that the owner did not live there (you might want to include where he/she did live). In this case it is assumed that the property was used for rent.
 - C. For streets with no consistent numbering the table in the front of some of the Directories giving the numbers at street crossings may be helpful.
- VI. Other records to check in specific cases:
- A. Houses built ca..1872-1928 - Look for an Intention to Build Statement. After 1923 look for Building Permits.
 - B. Houses built after ca. 1872 - Call the City of Providence Water Board.
* But be warned there are pitfalls in using this particular data.
 - C. Houses built between 1854 and 1898 - Consult the Tax Ledgers for those dates as they are especially helpful.
 - D. Houses on Doyle Avenue or near the Dexter Training Ground - You might want to look through the Records of the Commissioners of the Dexter Donation. (They are not indexed but are chronological).