

Tracing Your House's History

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Tiffin and Seneca County is blessed with a high percentage of older, unique homes. You may live in one or are just interested in one

- Is your family home still standing?
- How do you find out how old it is?
- Who lived (and died) there?

Searching a house's history can be easy or difficult or near impossible

First step – Has someone else done the work already?

Some communities have had inventories compiled of their historic homes.

Barb Howe, former Heidelberg professor, compiled inventories on many of the Tiffin and Seneca County houses and then published articles in the *Seneca Sentinel* newspaper from 1977-1980.

These were clipped, put into a binder and are now digitized in the Seneca County Digital Library, organized by the Tiffin-Seneca Public Library. 300+ pages
<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p15005coll27/id/28218>

Some towns may have compiled their own books or websites

Next step – also easy- City Directories research

Only works for cities. County directories do not have addresses per se before rural address standardization

Easiest – Visit Tiffin Seneca Public Library – excellent collection for Tiffin on open shelving in Local History area, ranging from late 1800's – current.

City directories usually arranged in sections:

Alphabetically by name

Geographically by street and number – in Tiffin after abt 1915

Subject, like yellow pages

Search City Directories by Street Address - Following your address from what you know backwards in time will give you some idea of who lived there, keeping in mind they may be renters and not owners.

Addresses can change- cities can renumber the houses, which was done in some areas in Tiffin after the 1913 flood and as cities expand original layout.

Sometimes you can date a house because the address disappeared going back in time. For example, it shows up as being occupied in 1935, but not in any years prior when others in the neighborhood were listed.

Prior to about 1915 in Tiffin, city directories only give names of people with address, but not the additional street address listing.

Tiffin Seneca Public Library's Seneca County Digital Memory has many of the city directories digitized and available online –

<https://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p15005coll27>

Search “Directories – Ohio” to find many of them

Next step: County Atlases and Maps

Atlases good for rural areas – show location of “farm houses” with small squares, along with churches, cemeteries and more.

Seneca County has 1874, 1896 Atlases, Wall maps 1854 + and more recent County and Township Map booklets

Also available in Tiffin Library and online –

<https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p15005coll27/id/4521>

Sanborn maps-

Created as a tool for insurance agents. Usually just the center of the city, not suburbs. Online at Library of Congress – Tiffin- 1887, 1891, 1896, 1901, 1908, 1914, 1925

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/?q=Sanborn+Fire+Insurance+Map+from+Tiffin,+Seneca+County,+Ohio>

Next step – still pretty easy - Current County Tax records- Seneca County Auditor

The list of sales of property do not usually go back before computerization

Date of house is a VERY rough estimate but worth checking out

<https://senecacountyauditor.org/>

Next step – getting tougher – Land Records

Visit the Seneca County Recorder's office 109 S. Washington (ugly building, nice people) ☺

Search land records for list of prior owners, starting with last known and work backwards in time. Will ONLY describe land, not buildings on property
You may have a Title Abstract which lists all prior owners by date; most people don't. Indexed by Grantor (Seller) and Grantee (buyer), then by date

Bollman's Index Chart – shortcut “decoder” for finding exact page in Index to go to.
Partial geographic index on cards– ask Recorder's Staff

Online Land Records from 1824 to 2024 – Images of all indexes and deeds are now available online from Recorder’s office <https://countyfusion1.kofiletech.us/>

Recorder Mike Dell contracted CountyFusion – GovOS to put them online for public use, at home.

The system is mainly used for all kinds of current day business, so historic searches can be a bit tricky. Limit to Ohio – Seneca County. Log in as public, search Archive Books, Archive Indexes, then Archives – Deeds. Or go to Recorder’s Office for one-on-one explanation.

Next Step - Hard – Tax Records

Older years not readily available to public

Familysearch has very early tax duplicates – abt. 1826-1850

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/255820?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

- ▶ Tracing the taxes for a property year by year can show when a major increase in taxes appears usually means new improvements- house ,barn, etc., but not defined.

▶ Using genealogical sources to flesh out former residents’ lives

Obituaries – Ohio Obituary Index <https://www.rbhayes.org/main/ohio-obituary-index/>- An obit may mention if they died at home and/or the funeral was held at home. May answer the question people have- did someone die in my home?....quite likely.

Marriage announcements & anniversaries – same thing

Using Census records to find addresses and residents starting in 1880. Ancestry.com (fee) or Familysearch (free)

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Census

[Findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com) – a free website where you can look up where people are buried, often gives additional information and photos.

Google maps - <http://google.com/maps>

Final example / The Case of the Missing School House

My old friend Beverly Wheatley asked for my help in 2022

Her friend, Doris Brickner, lived across the street from her at 440 North Sandusky Street in Tiffin in the 1920’s and 30’s.

About 1937 when Bev was about 10 years old, she was over at Doris’s house and her father was remodeling the kitchen. Bev very clearly remembered that under the kitchen walls they had found black chalk boards. It definitely had been a school at one time and she was impressed.

As she got older, she often asked people who were very interested in Tiffin history “Did you know that the house at 440 North Sandusky Street was once a school” and no one knew anything about it. In an old map of the area, the alley on the north side of the property is labeled School House Alley.

So I decided to see if I could find anything. Among the highlights of my search were:

City directories:

1911-2 – City Directory – Morris Bowers, Teacher – living here. Using Findagrave, it stated that he was the owner and principal of Tupper Plains Seminary, Meigs Co., OH from 1872-1886 and moved to Tiffin Ohio after his wife died.

Maps and Atlases:

1874 – Atlas of Seneca County, 1874, map of Clinton Township shows a school building near the lot where 440 Sandusky would eventually be.

Land records:

1863 – Clinton Township Board of Education bought ½ acre land for \$200, part of McCulloch Reserve from a bank, Miami County Branch. This deed was not recorded until Sep. 13, 1887.

1873- Silas W. Groff bought ½ acre land, part of McCulloch Reserve- which is the land 440 Sandusky was on from the Tiffin City Board of Education for \$650 (deed follows) Vol. 60, pg. 542. The deed states that the land was known as “the school lot”

These show that this lot was once owned by Clinton Twp. and then, Tiffin’s Board of Education.

My thoughts:

In my opinion, the land that 440 N. Sandusky St. is on was once owned first by the Clinton Twp. Bd of Education and then the Tiffin Board of Education. It showed up with a school building on it in the 1874 Atlas. In Aug. 1873 it was sold at auction to Silas Groff. People were living in it according to city directories by 1911 and probably before that. Doris Brickner was listed in the 1930 census there.

Whether the building stayed a school and was perhaps privately run by Morris Bowers in 1911 is a possibility, but it may just be a coincidence

The online Seneca County Assessors website for this property gives current owners, taxes, etc. and estimate of the age of the building which is given as 1841. Those estimates are frequently found to be inaccurate, but may be a clue to follow up.

The fact that the Atlas had a school building there in 1874, along with the deeds calling the property “the school lot”, seems like proof enough to me to verify that there was once a school house there which I think solved Bev’s case of the missing school house.