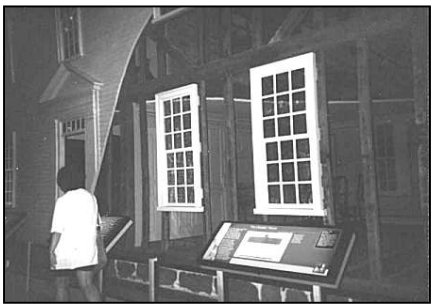
City of Jacksonville

Historic Preservation Commission

SUMMER 2006 NEWSLETTER

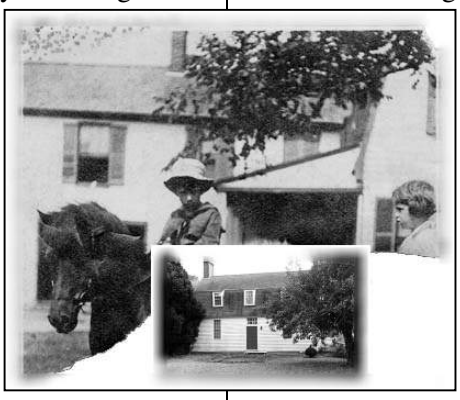
If These Walls Could Talk: Researching your home's history



Have you ever wondered about the early families that lived in your home? What were they like? What was their life like? These are questions commonly asked by present day owners of older structures. In fact, the Smithsonian "Within These Walls…" exhibit illustrates the history of an old house in a special interactive format.

But how does research on an older home begin? Where does a house detective find information? These tips from the Smithsonian may help:

1. Start at home by determining its style inside and out. Style can often be an indication of age. Look at the structure itself, noting additions, materials used, and how the parts (porch, roof, etc.) fit together. Try to distinguish original materials from later ones.
2. Check recorded deeds kept at the courthouse. Make a chronological list of all the owners of the property, starting with the most current. Working backwards, check the index to deeds by the buyer's name noting the name of the seller. Dramatic increases to the property value or sales price could signal that an addition was made. Make copies of documents that list data about the property or the owners.
3. Examine other public records. Mortgage, wills, and probate records can reveal information about previous owners. Local tax records can provide details about additions and improvements to the property. Maps or drawings may indicate structures that have been removed from the property. Building permits and utility records are another source of information. Remember to photocopy all pertinent information.
4. Visit the history section in the public library or local historical society. Old volumes, like indexes to towns and county histories, city directories, newspapers, obituaries, marriage and birth records, old telephone books, and census records, may reveal details about the previous owners and the property itself. Even church and parish records may be a good resource.
5. Check old city and county maps for owner information in addition to illustrations of roads or landmarks that no longer exist. Insurance maps, especially one produced by Sanborn Map Company, routinely list information about the structures, including the construction materials.
6. Libraries and historical societies often house old photographs or postcards of the town that may depict the structure. The Library of Congress catalogs old lithographs showing remarkably accurate views of many old structures within a community at the time of the litho. Compare them with recent photos taken of your property.
7. Talk to people. Track down descendants of former residents and ask questions of them. Ask neighbors or relatives of former residents if family pictures show the home in the background and collect stories about the former inhabitants and their lives. Be sure to document this information and get copies of relevant photos.



8. Organize your information into a scrapbook, allowing for gaps of time to be filled in later. You may even offer a copy to the library or historical society.
9. Keep up with history by including your information in the research, along with pictures of the home's present appearance. If your home is newer, start the history by writing your experiences and knowledge of its construction.

Your investigation may reveal information about hidden details and features of your home that your may want to restore. This research project cannot only provide you with useful information about your home; it can become an interesting and fun family activity!

Visit us on the web

www.jacksonvilleil.org

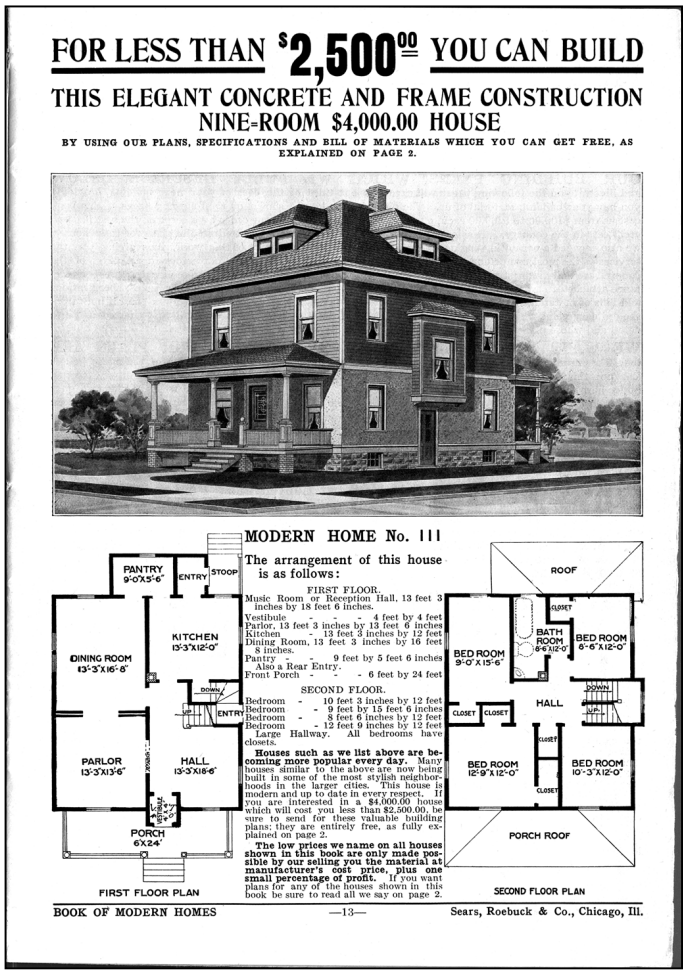
Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission
908 W. College Ave.
Jacksonville, Illinois 62650
217-245-0678

What Style Is Your House?

Colonial Revival (1880-1955)
America's first centennial renewed interest in the Federal and Georgian styles of the previous century. Usually symmetrical in appearance, Colonial Revival homes typically feature gable or hipped rooflines over rectangular 2-story structures of wood or brick. Dormers (sometimes with pediments) are common, as are dual chimneys, sidelights at the front entrances, and fanlights. Also seen are dentil molding, pilasters, columned porches, and other details drawn from combinations of the two styles, though Revival the scale is larger and ornamentation more evident. The 5-bay façade with a central entrance is common as well, though windows may also be bowed.

American Foursquare (1890-1930)
This style, also known as a box house, cube, or square style, is typically American. Some of the features may be shared with the Prairie style, though it is usually boxier in appearance. Typically two and a half stories tall with a full basement, the foursquare often has a dormer with a roofline that mimics the primary house roof style. Most foursquares have a pyramid hip roof and front porches that span the width of the home, with simple supporting columns.

From the front, foursquare houses are usually symmetrical, with a center front door and equal numbers of window groupings on each side on both levels. Bay windows are sometimes featured on the side (in the dining room typically) to add interest to the straight lined design. Shutters are another common decorative element. Foursquare homes are often constructed of wood with clapboard siding, but may also be seen in brick with a belt course between floors.



FOR LESS THAN $2,500.00 YOU CAN BUILD

THIS ELEGANT CONCRETE AND FRAME CONSTRUCTION NINE-ROOM $4,000.00 HOUSE

BY USING OUR PLANS, SPECIFICATIONS AND BILL OF MATERIALS WHICH YOU CAN GET FREE, AS EXPLAINED ON PAGE 2.

MODERN HOME No. 111

The arrangement of this house is as follows:

FIRST FLOOR.
Music Room or Reception Hall, 13 feet 3 inches by 18 feet 6 inches.
Vestibule - - - - 4 feet by 4 feet
Parlor, 13 feet 3 inches by 13 feet 6 inches
Kitchen - 13 feet 3 inches by 12 feet
Dining Room, 13 feet 3 inches by 16 feet 8 inches.
Pantry - - 9 feet by 5 feet 6 inches
Also a Rear Entry.
Front Porch - - - 6 feet by 24 feet

SECOND FLOOR.
Bedroom - 10 feet 3 inches by 12 feet
Bedroom - 9 feet by 15 feet 6 inches
Bedroom - 8 feet 6 inches by 12 feet
Bedroom - 12 feet 9 inches by 12 feet
Large Hallway. All bedrooms have closets.

Houses such as we list above are becoming more popular every day. Many houses similar to the above are now being built in some of the most stylish neighborhoods in the larger cities. This house is modern and up to date in every respect. If you are interested in a $4,000.00 house which will cost you less than $2,500.00, be sure to send for these valuable building plans; they are entirely free, as fully explained on page 2.

The low prices we name on all houses shown in this book are only made possible by our selling you the material at manufacturer's cost price, plus one small percentage of profit. If you want plans for any of the houses shown in this book be sure to read all we say on page 2.

BOOK OF MODERN HOMES —13— Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, Ill.

This family home usually boasted three or four bedrooms and a bathroom on the second level, with a dining room, kitchen, living room and entry foyer on the first floor. This simplistic design was a commonly offered style for Sears, Aladdin, and other catalog homes of the day.

Save this sheet...
...more styles in the next edition!