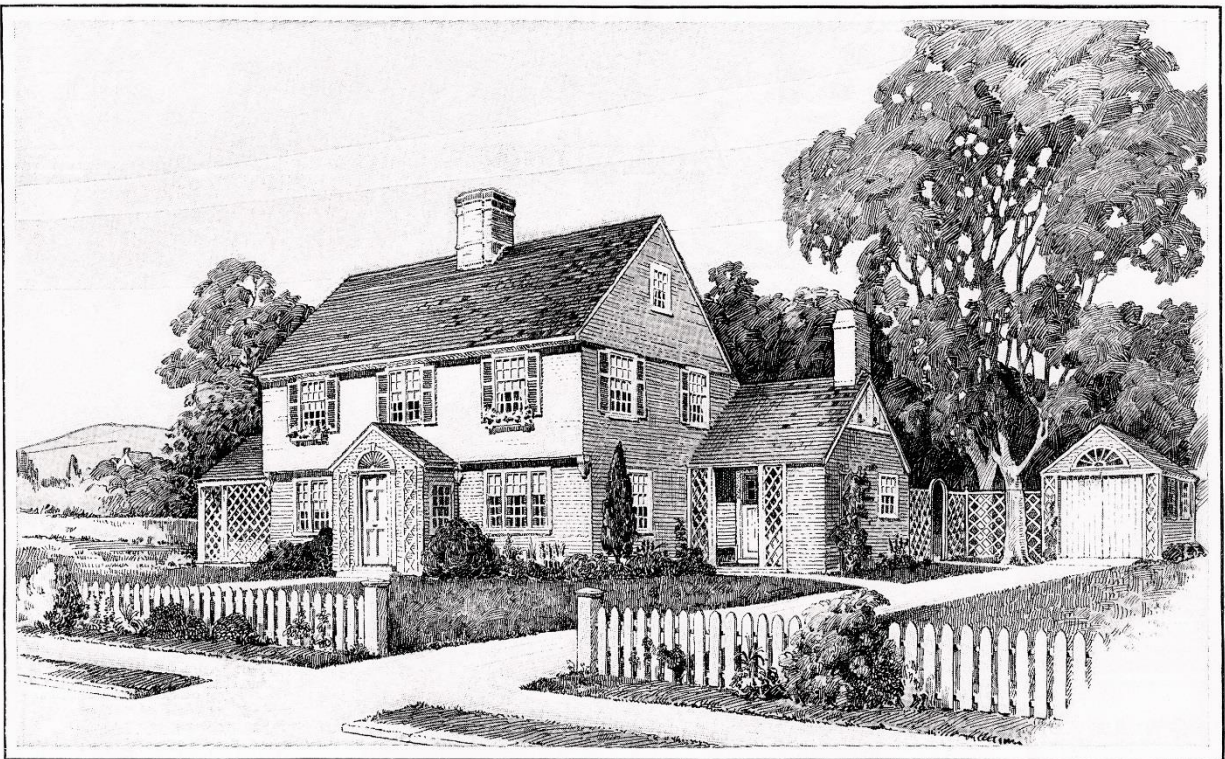


WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF MY STERLING HEIGHTS HOUSE?



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40255 Dodge Park Road, Sterling Heights, MI • (586) 446-2665 • www.shpl.net

Current residents of Sterling Heights are lucky to live in an area where there are houses built over a wide range of years, all the way back to the 1860s and up to the current construction site down the road. Many people have a curiosity about their home's past; what types of families lived out their lives within the walls? Some people need to know when their house was built for more practical reasons. Researching the age and history of a house, whether it is your own house, or an interesting house that caught your eye, can be an interesting project.

First, a little history. Our city was known as Sterling Township prior to 1968. After that it became the city of Sterling Heights. Older homes built in the township days may have notations about being in Sterling, or possible even Warren, or Utica, depending on what local town they identified with. Most homes built prior to the 1940s were built as farm homes. In the 1950s, manufacturing plants started being built, and a great influx of population arrived to work in those plants. Some of these workers built homes along the main roads, with large lots and often, large vegetable gardens. In the 1960s, the traditional subdivisions began being built from the sold-off and subdivided large farms. These had the standard smaller lots, sidewalks, and garages.

To find the history of a home, first start with the current owner. Then go back one owner at a time, finding who sold to whom, and when. Keep going until you get back to the original builder and original deed. This is fairly easy to do with modern houses. The very old farm homes get a little trickier, as you will find records of pieces of the property being sold off a little at a time and need to figure out where the actual home sale is among those.

RESOURCES

Sterling Heights City records

The City of Sterling Heights Assessing Department has a record for each property in the city. It gives the current owner, and usually some previous owners and sale prices, square footage, year built, assessed value, a photo of the property/home, and other details. There is an online version of this accessed through the city web site. To use online, go to:

www.sterling-heights.net. From the dropdown menu under Online Services, choose Assessing Information, then choose Property and Land Search from that screen. You may search by street name and house number, or by parcel number (if you know it). Once you get the record up for the property you are interested in, click the Buildings menu choice from the left, and then click the Plus sign on the record to expand the information. This is where you get the year it was built. Often, on this record under Sales, it will show previous owners under Grantor (seller) and Grantee (buyer).

Researchers can go directly to the Assessing Department if they choose. There may be additional information that may be obtained in person. There will be a charge for the copying of documents.

City of Sterling Heights
Office of Assessing
4055 Utica Road
Sterling Heights, MI 48313
(586) 446-2340

The Sterling Heights Building Department is another department worth checking. They are in the same building as Assessing, and their phone number is (586) 446-2360.

Sterling Heights Public Library
40255 Dodge Park Road
Sterling Heights, MI 48313
(586) 446-2642

Researching the home about more personal information, such as information about the people that lived there, house fires, etc. may be found at the Sterling Heights Public Library. The library has access to genealogy databases that allow you to research the U.S. Census. The census has been done every ten years, and the detailed census sheets in digital image form have been released for searching and viewing up through 1940. (Unfortunately, the 1890 Census was lost to fire, and is unsearchable.) The 1950 census is expected to be released in 2022. The census records began in 1790, and may provide names, occupations, birthplaces, and ages of a home's occupants. The households are listed in the order the census taker went down the street, from house to house, so information on the home's neighbors is usually on the same page. If you are researching a home existing prior to 1940, this is a valuable source of information. It can be searched by name, or browsed in a geographic area. Keep in mind all of the census years released so far will be listed as Sterling Township, which did become entirely Sterling Heights later.

The library also has a collection of Bresser's Cross Index directories, which is arranged by address and lists the person the home's telephone was registered to (not necessarily the owner). The collection includes a variety of years between 1968 and the present. There are no traditional "city directories" for Sterling Township or Sterling Heights.

The library has a collection of historical plat maps of Sterling Township, going back to 1859, and the most recent being from 1979. These maps show the outline of the farm properties and who owned them. These are very useful if you are researching an old farmhouse. It will also show what farmer owned the land a current subdivision is on if you can place it on the map. You could then look up that property in the US Agricultural Census, searchable on Ancestry.com and see what crops and livestock were once raised on your subdivision land!

Newspaper articles and obituaries can be used for researching an older home also. The library has the Utica Sentinel newspaper from 1876-1961 on microfilm. This paper reported news on Utica, Shelby, and Sterling Township. Ads for new subdivisions, and news stories and obituaries,

farm auctions, etc. can give more background to the former families from your home. There is no index, so be prepared to browse. There is also a clipping file of news articles where information about house fires, criminal events, etc. of more recent vintage would help you.

The library's collection also contains many old photos of houses and families from our city. There are also printed aerial photographs of Sterling taken in 1969 and 1973. Aerial photos show the placement of the house on the property, and the surrounding area. Detroit Edison has a wonderful collection of aerial photos it took available online through Wayne State University. The images go back into the 1940s and through 1997. Web site:
http://www.clas.wayne.edu/photos/ap_index.htm

In the late 1980s and early 1990s a group of about 100 Sterling Township 'old-timers' were interviewed for an oral history project. The library has that collection of interviews (on audiocassette) accompanied by a typed transcript available for check out. Most of the reminiscences are of the 1930s and 1940s, often describing their homes and life in the area. If your house matches with one talked about, it could be your lucky day.

Macomb County records (Note addresses for many offices have changed since the fire in the Old County Building. Check the websites for future relocations back to that building or other buildings in the future.)

Macomb County Register of Deeds
32 Market Street

Mount Clemens, MI 48043 (586) 469-7953

<http://www.macombgov.org/clerksoffice/RegisterOfDeedsIndex.htm>

The best way to search for deeds and related documents is through the County Register of Deeds website. Their webpage gives the choice of using www.uslandrecords.com or the SuperIndex <http://deeds.macombgov.org/>. US Land Records charges a fee to search, and for document copies, but SuperIndex is free to search, with a reasonable charge for copies. The SuperIndex is easy to use, and can be searched by personal names, addresses, or almost any word that appears on the document, and there are documents covering transactions back at least into the 1860s. Keep in mind that searching by a house number for old "farm homes" will only work until as far back as the house numbering system started on that road. Prior to that time, searching by parcel number, legal description, or name would be necessary. These webpages can be accessed through any internet computer. County staff will conduct a search for you for a fee, if you prefer not to do it yourself. The Register of Deeds office also can supply a letter-sized copy of a subdivision plat for \$1.00.

Macomb County Treasurer
2nd Floor
1 South Main Street
Mount Clemens, MI 48043 (586) 469-5190
<http://www.macombgov.org/treasurer/index.htm>

The Treasurer's Office has tax rolls beginning in 1960 on microfilm. A copy of tax information is \$1.00 per copy. Tax information may be used to determine when a house was added to unimproved property by seeing a spike in property value all of a sudden. This would be especially useful in researching older homes where it may be difficult to find other documentation, but probably would be more useful if their rolls went back further. Official legal descriptions of property can be obtained from the Land File Division of the Macomb County Treasurer's Office. Their phone is (586) 469-5312.

Macomb County Probate Court
21850 Dunham Road
Mount Clemens, MI 48043 (586) 469-5290
<http://probatecourt.macombgov.org/>

Probate records may give additional information about the transfer of ownership as part of an estate. Such information is found in the deceased person's probate packet, which occasionally will describe the house or property. The website for the court has a link for "Case Lookup". The Mount Clemens Public Library (<http://www.mtclib.org/>) also has microfilm reels of older probate records and an index for them at <http://www.mtclib.org/search/probate.php>. The library's microfilm covers 1821-1929, with a few gaps.

Additional Resources

Macomb County Heritage Alliance (Historical Commission)
1 South Main, 7th Floor
Mount Clemens, MI 48043
<http://heritagealliance.macombgov.org/HeritageAlliance-LocalHistory>

Macomb County Clerk's Office
40 North Main, 1st Floor
Mount Clemens, MI 48043 (586) 469-5120
<http://www.macombgov.org/clerksoffice/Index.htm>

Macomb County Historical Society (Crocker House Museum)

15 Union Street
Mount Clemens, MI 48043 (586) 465-2488
<http://www.crockerhousemuseum.com/>

General resource books owned by area libraries

Brooks, Pamela. *How to Research Your House, every home tells a story.* 2007.

Green, Betsy J. *Discovering the History of Your House and Your Neighborhood.* 2002.

Houck, Maurcia DeLean. *"If These Walls Could Talk..."an easy guide to tracking your house's genealogy.* 1997.

Howard, Hugh. *How Old is This House?* 1989.

Light, Sally. *House Histories: A Guide to Tracing the Genealogy of Your Home.* 1989.

Morgan, James. *If These Walls had Ears: the biography of a house.* 1996.