

## *Why research the history of a building?*

- National Register of Historic Places nominations
- Renaissance Zone tax credits
- Rehabilitation
- Promoting the history and heritage of the region
- Developing tourism
- Simple curiosity

These all good reasons to begin researching building history. No matter what the driving reason, there are a number of resources that can help a researcher understand more about a property and its history. Some of the primary research centers in southwest North Dakota include:

- Dickinson Public Library
- Stoxen Library at Dickinson State University
- Dickinson Museum Center
- State Historical Society of North Dakota at Bismarck.

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Washington, D. C. 20240

### Dickinson Museum Center

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### Dickinson Museum Center

## RESEARCHING HISTORIC BUILDINGS



*Dickinson Public Library circa 1910*

[www.dickinsonmuseumcenter.org](http://www.dickinsonmuseumcenter.org)

## Getting Started

There are a number of resources that can help piece together the larger picture of a building's history, much like detective work. Local government resources generally can provide most of the information to establish the legal description for a property.

The **COUNTY COURTHOUSE** might have records pertaining to deeds, mortgages, wills, probate records, tax sales, and court litigation. The courthouse will also have an abstract that provides a legal description of the property, and who has owned it through time.

Original building permits, legal descriptions, and tax records can also be found at **CITY HALL**. A building permit can sometimes provide information about the builder, the owner, the architect or contractor, materials used, a sketch of the floor plan, and the original cost. The City Assessor's Office will also have a legal description of a property, and construction dates for any buildings on the property. Other tax records available might also contain legal descriptions of a building, and might indicate changes to a property.

After the legal description of the property has been established, a researcher can more easily trace other records.

## Other Resources

Archival and special collections at historical societies, museums, archives, libraries, and local universities and colleges are all potential sources of additional information about a building.

**MAPS AND ATLASES:** *SANBORN INSURANCE MAPS* provide detailed information for buildings and properties for a number of cities throughout the United States. *FIRE UNDERWRITERS INSPECTION BUREAU MAPS* provide information about businesses for smaller communities, but usually do not include houses. *COUNTY PLAT MAPS* or *ATLASES* show land ownership for large tracts of land, and are especially useful for researching rural areas. The *UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY TOPOGRAPHICAL MAPS* also indicate the location and number of structures in rural areas, and show terrain contours and major geographical features in relation to property and buildings.

**PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTIONS:** Universities, libraries, historical societies, and museums often have photographic collections available to researchers. Former property owners and neighbors might also have photographs of a building.

**PREVIOUS STUDIES:** Local and state archives might also have information about architectural surveys for a community, and nomination forms for the National Register of Historic Places. If a building is in a design-

nated historic district, surveys and nomination forms for that district might include information on individual buildings as well.

**BOOKS AND PERIODICALS:** *PUBLISHED HISTORIES*, featuring local communities, neighborhoods, businesses, and families, may contain information on buildings. *CITY DIRECTORIES* contain information about owners and occupants of homes and businesses, list the primary business for a building, and can be used to trace the location of people and businesses over the years. Old *NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES* might also contain information relevant to a building's history.

**OTHER INFORMATION:** Ask *NEIGHBORS* about previous owners, changes to the property, and neighborhood history. Check *STATE AND FEDERAL CENSUS RECORDS* for information about former property owners. Research information about local *ARCHITECTS AND ARCHITECTURAL FIRMS*, as well as records that contain information about significant people or events associated with a property. *SCHOOL, CHURCH, and CEMETERY RECORDS* might also provide information about individuals and families connected to a building. Look for more than just buildings. Other significant features of a property are often overlooked such as out buildings, fences, landscape features, and public art. These features can also help tell a building's story.