

HOW TO RESEARCH YOUR OLD HOUSE

One of the pleasures of owning an old house is not only knowing how old it is, but who built it, who has lived in it, what stories are connected with it and even what it originally looked like. In research of this kind it is often necessary to investigate several different sources of information. The Heritage Guild can recommend the following courses of action.

1. The W.P. Bartlett panoramic view of Livermore is often used as a reference point to determine whether a structure existed on a given site in 1889. The Livermore Fire Marshal has a set of Sanborn Insurance maps for the period 1917-1930 which may also be helpful in dating your house.

2. You can arrive at the approximate age of your house by studying its architectural style. Historically, certain styles were in vogue at various time periods. Pioneer (or Salt-Box), a form rather than a style, was popularly used in Livermore from 1860 to as late as 1910; Italianate, from 1875 to 1895; Queen Anne, from 1895 to 1915; California Bungalow, from 1920 to 1940, and; Mission Revival, also beginning in 1920, is still being used. The Livermore Public Library has only a few architectural guidebooks, but start there on your style study.

3. The Livermore Public Library has old Livermore newspapers on microfilm dating from 1874. An account of current building news and real estate transactions is listed in most issues. Occassionally in one of the January issues of each year you can find a list of building permits issued the previous year. These listings might be helpful to you as they also include barns, well-houses, garages and miscellaneous additions costing over \$100.

4. The Alameda County Recorder's office in Oakland (Room 100) has what is called the grantor-grantee index which dates back over a hundred years. The grantor is the seller and the grantee is the buyer. When you go there to search your title, take with you your deed containing the legal description and a map of the property.

You begin by working backward since you know the date you bought the property and the name of the person who sold it to you, begin by looking in the grantee index for the years previous to find his name and who sold it to him (the grantor). Then, looking in earlier grantee indexes for that grantor's name you should find who sold it to him. Continue looking back in this manner until you reach the approximate year your house was built - at some point you will find the name of the builder or the original owner and the date your house was built or first sold.

(over)

CAUTION: This is a tedious and sometimes frustrating process recommended only to the hardy. If you find several entries for an individual in the index, you should ask to see the microfilm record of the transaction, giving the clerk the book and page number that appear in the right hand column of the index. This way you can assure yourself that you are still on the right track, since that individual may have bought and sold several pieces of property.

5. The Heritage Guild has also done some research on old buildings in Livermore, and may have information helpful to you. Contact Garret Drummond at 447-5475 or Janet Newton at 447-9592. These people can also put you in touch with knowledgeable sources.

In the meantime, if your old house research uncovers some interesting facts that you would like to share, the Guild welcomes the opportunity to have a copy of your information for their files.

GBD:3/77