

HOW OLD IS MY HOUSE?

Have you ever asked yourself this question, but didn't know where to go to find the answer? If so, the following information will help guide you in your research.

STEP 1: OBSERVATION

What architectural style is the building?

Is it an 1890s Victorian, a 1920s Tudor Revival, or a 1950s Ranch House? Fullerton's neighborhoods are filled with architectural styles reflecting periods of local development, and the style of your home can be a clue as to the age of the dwelling. Knowing the style is helpful in establishing the general date of construction as well as fleshing out the building's history.

The Fullerton Heritage website has a guide (*Architecture Styles in Fullerton*) that will assist you with identifying your home's style. The Fullerton Public Library also has books on specific styles (e.g., *Ranch House Style*, *Victorian House Book*, *Red Tile Style: America's Spanish Revival Architecture*, etc.) and helpful identification guidebooks, such as *A Field Guide to American Houses*, *The Visual Dictionary of American Domestic Architecture*, and *Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms: 1600-1945*. Some familiarity with architectural styles can also alert you to possible changes, such as the removal or addition of porches, changes in windows and doors, etc., that have occurred over the years. Examine the house closely for evidence of additions or alterations, remembering that a building may have a long history of rebuilding and modernization over the decades.

Searching your house for physical evidence may yield a construction date. Check to see if there are any identifying dates on or near the building. The building may have a date stone or other type of inscription set into an exterior wall. Look in closets or other places where the contractor may have stamped his name. Also check the sidewalks or pavements in your neighborhood for these stamps.

Careful inspection of the building's construction materials, design concept, and construction methods may also yield clues. The attic and basement usually are good places to investigate since features often remain exposed in these areas. Trained investigators can date a house by studying the wood, mortar, plaster, or paint.

Where is the house located in Fullerton?

Is your house near the old center of the city or is it part of a later expansion? If your house is located in the original townsite, it was most likely constructed between 1880 and 1920. If your house is located south of Bastanchury, north of Rossllyn, and east of Raymond, more than likely it was constructed after World War II. If your house is part of a tract or subdivision or part of a preservation or potential preservation zone, it may be possible to place it within a specific construction period.

STEP 2: ASK AROUND

Frequently there are people in the community who will remember things about your home and its past owners that will provide useful clues about its history. Talk to your neighbors, previous owners, survivors of previous owners, longtime residents of

your area, the mail carrier, local carpenters and plumbers, and anyone else who might know something about your house. Someone might have an old photograph, a bill, a diary, a genealogy, or written correspondence that will help place your house in the correct time period. Try to verify the anecdotes or stories you hear.

Also, experts on local history will know of research materials that may contain relevant information about the building and its relationship to Fullerton history.

STEP 3: BUILDING PERMITS

Building permits will tell you when a house was built and identify the builder, cost of construction, and building type. On occasion, an architect may be identified. The first date "FOO.O.K." indicates the footing inspection or beginning of construction. Make a note of the measurements, number of rooms and stories, since changes in these features will signal an alteration.

In Fullerton, copies of building permits are kept at the Development Services Department in City Hall (2nd floor, 303 W. Commonwealth). Older permits are on microfiche. There is a small charge for photocopies of permits.

STEP 4: CITY DIRECTORIES

Historical city directories can help you to establish an approximate date when your house was built, and they are an excellent resource for learning more about the people who lived in your home. Fullerton city directories, usually published annually, are divided into two sections. The *resident section* includes an alphabetical listing of people living in the city, and lists of the head of household, place of employment and/or occupation, and name of spouse. Earlier directories may also include the names of children. An asterisk (*) following a name indicates that the occupant owned the building. The *address section* is arranged alphabetically by the name of the street, and lists residents by address. By following the city directories from year to year it is possible to trace a succession of occupants. The first listing for a building may indicate the year of construction.

Fullerton city directories will be found in the Launer Room of the Fullerton Public Library (353 W. Commonwealth). When using the directories, watch for street name changes and house number changes.

STEP 5: SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAPS

Fire insurance maps are an important source for building information. Fire insurance maps produced by the D. A. Sanborn Company from 1876 to 1970 depict residential and commercial sections of cities in the United States. Each map illustrates the site, size and shape, building materials, and use of homes, commercial buildings, and factories. Starting in 1890 for Fullerton, the Sanborn Maps show the footprint of every structure on a street.

The Launer Room of the Fullerton Public Library has maps of the original townsite for 1890, 1894, 1900, 1907, 1911, 1917, and 1927. No photocopying privileges are allowed for the maps. Later maps up to the 1940s can be found in the Fullerton Development Services Department in City Hall (2nd floor, 303 W. Commonwealth).