House History – What to Look For and Where

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Howe, Fleming, Kemp & Overbeck, *Houses and Homes: Exploring Their History*, American
       Association for State and Local History, 1987
Weber, *How Old is Your House? A Guide to Research*, Pequot Press, 1978
Green, *Discovering the History of Your House and Your Neighborhood* Santa Monica Press
       Books, 2002
Speltz, "If Ordinary Walls Could Talk: Piecing Together the History of My House" *Wisconsin
       Magazine of History,* Spring 2008 p. 2-17.

1. History of the Structure

Read about Madison history/ neighborhood history / subdivision history:

David Mollenhoff's book (Madison: a History of the Formative Years) 2nd ed. 2003
Stuart Levitan's book (Madison: Illustrated Sesquicentennial History, 1856-1931) 2006
Neighborhood histories and walking tour booklets

Read about house architectural styles:

McAlester, Virginia & Lee *A Field Guide to American Houses,* Knopf, 1991.
Walker, Lester, *American Shelter: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the American Home,*
       Overlook Press, 1981
Schweitzer & Davis, *America's Favorite Homes: Mail Order Catalogues as a Guide to Popular
       Early 20th Century Houses,* Wayne State U. Press, 1990

Identify the legal description of the property - Looks like this:
       Fair Oaks Subdivision, Block 16, Lot 9
       and parcel number (251-0710-053-0109-0)

Found on the tax bill or assessment notice
or use City of Madison Assessor's Office web site:
       http://www.cityofmadison.com/assessor/property/index.cfm

gives property details, sales details, legal description, tax details and special assessments

Dane County Plat Maps for townships in Dane County showing land ownership in <u>rural</u>
areas with black spots for houses   Published every 2-3 years until 1960s then every year.

Sanborn Insurance Maps for City of Madison exist for the following dates:
       1885, 1892, 1898, 1902, 1908, 1919, 1923, 1939, & 1942 They show an outline
drawing of the building/s on a piece of property and by comparing the property from year
to year you can see changes

Both are available at the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives Room, 4th Floor in hard
       copy and on microfilm in the Reading Room

and online at the Library of Congress: https://www.loc.gov/maps/?q=madison+wisconsin

Subdivision Maps when rural land is divided into building lots – available in Dane Co.
Register of Deeds, Real Estate Division, Room 110 City-County Building

Tax Rolls (annual) on microfilm at Wisconsin Historical Society 4th floor Archives Room.
Was the land that your house sits on "always" in the City of Madison or when did it get
annexed into the city, where was it before: Blooming Grove, Burke, Town of Madison ?

Tax rolls document the acreage, valuation, owner's name and name of the person paying
the tax. The records can help determine the age of the house by noting changes to the
property's value from one year to the next and develop a chain of ownership similar to that
found in the Register of Deeds Office.

Building Permits (back to the 1920s but not required until later)
Madison Building Inspection Unit, lower level Municipal Bldg. - on a computer
Or go to City of Madison Licenses & Permits webpage

https://elam.cityofmadison.com/CitizenAccess/Default.aspx
Register for an account, then select "permitting" tab, then enter the property address

Older Assessment Records   Madison Assessor's Office, Room 107 City-County Bldg.
Ask office staff to request the "assessor's field notes" from storage (it will take a couple of
days) They will make copies for you at 25 cents per page.

Architecture and History Inventory – Wisconsin Historical Society online database
http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/ahi/

https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records?&facets=CATEGORIES%3a%22Architecture+
and+History+Inventory%22%2cCommunity%3a%22Madison%22

The Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory (AHI) is a digital source of information on more than
148,000 historic buildings, structures and objects throughout Wisconsin. Each property has a digital
record providing basic information about the property and most include exterior images.

2. Former Owners/Occupants

Start with you and your history in the house: purchase date and price, remodelings, special
events, etc. Identify your own pictures of the house - exterior and interior

Who owned/lived in the house before you back to who built it & who owned the land
before that

Abstract of the house – a document received at closing from the mortgage company that
lists all the previous owners, not done any more, could pay Dane Co. Title Co. or other title
company or a genealogist to do the research

Madison City Directories   listings by address as well as by name
1858 – 1923   on-line   http://uwdc.library.wisc.edu/collections/WI/MadisonLocHist

1858 – date   hard copy at Madison Public Library - 2nd floor

Dane County Register of Deeds Office -- Real Estate Records
Grantor (seller) / Grantee (buyer) Indexes give you document numbers that you can use on their computer to see the actual document which can be printed for a fee

Obituaries - a way to learn about the people who lived in your house and names of descendants to contact for stories and photographs

Death dates can be found by calling the Dane Co Register of Deeds, Room 110 City-County Building, and making an appointment to search their computer records - 267-8810
(if the person died in Dane Co.) or check Forest Hill Cemetery records online at:
https://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/find-a-park/cemetery/search.cfm

Obituaries can be found/read/copied by using:
Newspapers Index to obtain citations to obituaries 1958-date on Madison Public Library LinkCat web site and then using microfilm of WSJ and/or CT at Mad Pubic Library or WHS

Newspaper Archive – an on-line full-text database of some Wisconsin newspapers available free through Madison Public Library web site

www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/research/databases/newspaper-archive

type in your library bar code number for access. Full page and fully searchable text of Wisconsin newspapers – not complete, but useful

Census Records, every 10 years, up through 1940
on line through Ancestry.com or Heritage Quest available free through Madison Public Library LinkCat Databases and at Wisconsin Historical Society Reading Room. Once you know the names of people who lived in your house you can find out family relationships, race, state or country of birth, year of immigration, occupation, etc.

Frank Custer Local History Research Files - "Custer Cards" – Wisconsin Historical Society, 4th floor, Archives Room. Frank Custer, CT newspaper reporter, cut up newspaper articles and pasted them on 3x5 cards, arranged by subject, people, business names and addresses

https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/9911125992102121