



NORTH SHORE HERITAGE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

A BASIC GUIDE TO HOUSE HISTORY RESEARCH IN NORTH AND WEST VANCOUVER

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Prepared by David Pike and Gillian Welsh, with thanks to Francis Mansbridge, John Stuart, Lois Enns, Carol Howie and Mike Davies for their contributions

Commissioning House Research

Option One:

James Johnstone, a specialist house historian in Vancouver, will research your house for you, for a fee. His details are:

James Johnstone
House genealogist
604 254-4666
househistorian@yahoo.ca
www.homehistoryresearch.com

James Johnstone has researched around 300 houses in Vancouver. Here is a brief summary of his costs:

"Researching your home's history ... requires anywhere from two to sometimes five days. Inputting, editing and printing all this information takes at least another full day. Depending on how old your home is, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$500 to \$2,000 plus. This price is based on the Vancouver Historical Society's recommended rate of \$25 per hour for home history research services. Costs for copies of historical photos or maps are extra." A typical cost is around \$1,000.

Here is what the standard package for research in Vancouver covers:

- A one- to two-page historical and demographic overview of your immediate neighbourhood based on the information gleaned from the research of your house and of its immediate neighbours.
- Information on when your house was built, and by whom.
- A multi-paged data chart that shows you year-by-year who lived in your house, their occupation and sometimes even their work address. To give some context to your home's history this chart will also include basic information on the people who lived in the houses immediately beside and across from you. You will find fascinating details on the lives of the various people who lived in your house, for example: where they were born, when they moved to Vancouver, when and where and by whom they were married, their religious affiliation, sometimes even the circumstances of their death and where they were buried, in footnote form.
- An explanation of the origin of the name(s) of your street and those close by.
- A chart showing highlights of Vancouver and BC history.
- If your budget allows, a search for and copies of newspaper articles and sometimes obituaries for the people who lived in your house. Sometimes archival photographs of your house and the residents, or of your neighbourhood.

Option Two:

West Vancouver Museum and Archives plans to offer research for a fee. Details will be incorporated when available.

Do-It-Yourself House Research

Few of us have the time or skills to match a professional researcher in the extent of information gathered on a house. However, a limited amount of time can go a long way - an afternoon or two at the Archives, a couple of evenings poking around on the web, and some conversations if possible with neighbours or former residents can result in a pretty good historical record.

Here are some notes to get you going, based on research by ourselves and other contributors to the North Shore Heritage Network. More detailed guides to house research published by the North and West Vancouver Archives follow.

For all districts, start by checking if your house is listed in the **Heritage Inventory** -- if so, someone will have done at least some of the work for you. There are copies of the published Heritage Inventories for the City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver and West Vancouver in the North and West Vancouver Archives. If your house is on the register, the planning department of your municipal district should have a file on your house.

For West Vancouver, see the Municipal Hall section of the research guide in Appendix II.

The City of North Vancouver (141 West 14th Street) has a file on each property listed on the CNV Heritage Inventory. These were prepared for the 1994 inventory and vary in the amount and type of information, depending on the documentation available. At a minimum, a building permit, photos and some archival photos are available, as well as the inventory worksheet. These files are currently unavailable as they are being used for an update of the Heritage Inventory, but should be available again in late 2005.

The District of North Vancouver similarly has research on all houses on its inventory, with details from local historian Roy Pallant. Copies of these are available at District Hall (355 West Queens) or from Roy Pallant himself.

For contact details for all three districts, please see p7.

A second place to start in North Vancouver is a list of **building permits** in the Archives, which is cross-referenced by architect, builder and owner.

The Archives in North and West Vancouver both have sets of annual **city directories** of properties cross-referenced to owners, covering Vancouver, North Vancouver and West Vancouver. The North Vancouver Archives has the more comprehensive collection, dating back further, but West Vancouver Archives has a full set from the late 1930s. (West Vancouver Archives also has tax assessment rolls dating to 1913.)

These directories date back to the early 1900s and further, mostly in the original format, with some on microfilm. First, look up the occupant under the address, then look up the name for further detail on their occupation or status, sometimes their employer. If you don't have time to go through every directory, sample every few years. It's important to note that these record the occupants, not the owners, of properties, so frequent turnover may indicate that the property was rented. For ownership, you have to look up the land titles in New Westminster. There may also be discrepancies or time lag in the records -- for example, one occupant of a house said she lived there until 1937 or 1938, but the family only showed up at their new address in the directory for 1940.

North Vancouver Archives also has **fire insurance maps** from 1910, 1930, 1965. West Vancouver Archives has fire insurance plans from 1930 and 1938.

Photos of your house, neighbourhood or former residents may be available at the North and West Vancouver Archives.

You can search the North Van Archives for photos through their online database.

Go to the NVMA website, which works best with Internet Explorer:

www.dnv.org/nvma/

Then go to the Collections section, select Archives Database, then, for example, search for your road name under Keyword.

The BC Archives website carries details of **birth, death and marriage certificates**, for which you can search online -- look for the Vital Events section, and then search on All Vital Events Indexes. Use this to gather more detail on the residents listed in the city directories:

www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/

Actual death certificates, which show details of birth, parents and so on, are available at the Vancouver Public Library.

The accurate dates of vital events determined using the BC Archives website can lead to other useful information. The North Vancouver City Library has back copies of **local newspapers** such as *The Express* (1905-1912), *North Shore Press* (1913- late 1940s) and *North Shore News* on microfiche. Similarly, the West Van Archives has copies of *Lions Gate Times*, *West Van News* and *North Shore News* on microfiche.

If you look at the newspapers immediately following a vital event (birth, marriage or death), announcements in the newspapers can be very useful for finding the names of relatives or club associations. Those associations can be useful for finding early photographs of former residents or your property. If you are lucky, you may also stumble across something, like an announcement of the original building permit -- but it takes a lot of time checking through each paper for limited results. There are no indexes. You can make printouts.

The City of North Vancouver Council can provide **blueprints** of house plans, with copies available for a fee. West Vancouver's Municipal Hall has a variety of resources, such as permits and plans (see Appendix II).

For details on the original and subsequent **ownership title** to the house -- in other words records of the owners rather than occupants -- you need to approach the BC Land Title & Survey Authority in New Westminster.

The website is www.ltsa.ca, but you cannot search for past titles online.

The authority suggests that anyone seeking a history of their house's ownership and transfers write in with their request, including the legal description (lot and plan number) of the property, plus an open cheque for an amount "not exceeding \$100." They would then contact you if the cost were more. With old houses, they say they are not able to give a clear estimate of the cost, but indicate that it should not be more than \$100-200. The work would take six to eight weeks. A professional researcher or land title search agent would be able to conduct the research faster, but would be more expensive (see Title Search in the phone book).

The LTSA address is:
New Westminster Land Title Office
Suite 300, 88 6th Street,
New Westminster, BC
V3L 5B3

Water service records are available through local councils, and will show when a property was hooked up.

Gas Service

Manufactured gas, a rather nasty brew of combustible gas produced from heating coal, was supplied to North Vancouver when the Second Narrows Bridge (now the railway bridge) was rebuilt in 1932.

By this time, a distribution system had been built to deliver this gas to homes on the North Shore and the system was expanded through the 1930s and 40s until it served much of the Grand Boulevard and Lonsdale areas.

Manufactured-gas was replaced with the natural gas (98% methane) that we used today in the late 1950s with completion of the Westcoast Energy pipeline, which brings natural gas to the Lower Mainland from wells and production facilities in Northeastern British Columbia.

When the Second Narrows Iron Workers Memorial Bridge was finally completed in 1960, two 10" pipelines under the bridge deck were used to bring natural gas to the North Shore and with the introduction of this clean fuel the gas distribution grid on the North Shore was greatly expanded.

You can find out more about the history and location of gas service on your property by contacting Terasen Gas at the customer service number listed below. Whether you are planting a shrub or excavating for a new foundation, every homeowner should know the location of the buried utilities on their own property. You can find the location of your gas service and other utilities from BC One Call at the number below.

Terasen Gas Customer Service:

Email: customerservice@terasengas.com

Phone: 1-888-224-2710

Fax: 1-888-224-2720

Call before you dig!

BC One Call: 1-800-474-6886 Cell *6886

Monday to Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm

To request gas line information

This history of gas on the North Shore was prepared for this guide by Mike Davies.

Archives and Other Contacts

Here are contact details for specialists who may be helpful in local research:

Daien Ide, Reference Historian
North Vancouver Museum and Archives
Community History Centre
3203 Institute Road, North Vancouver
604-987-5618
dide@dnv.org or nvarchives@telus.net

Melanie Hardbattle
Archivist, West Vancouver Museum and Archives
Gertrude Lawson House
680 17th Street, West Vancouver
604-925-7298
mhardbattle@westvancouver.ca

Please note that the archivists will help show you how to find resources, but are not in a position to do the research for you.

John Stuart
North Vancouver historian
604-986-4689
stuartj@direct.ca

Roy Pallant
North Vancouver historian
604-986-8969
Roy Pallant is an experienced and knowledgeable local historian, and president of the North Vancouver Historical Society. This meets at the North Vancouver Museum and Archives at 7 pm on the second Wednesday of each month, and also publishes a monthly newsletter. He previously researched all houses on the DNV Heritage Inventory.

For information on municipal heritage programs, please contact:

Jocelyne Piercey, Planning Technician at the City of North Vancouver, at 604-990-4236

Kathleen Larsen, Planning Assistant at the District of North Vancouver, at 604-990-2369

Stephen Mikicich, Community Planner at the District of West Vancouver, on 604-925-7055

Farther Afield

New Westminster Library publishes a useful guide to historical research. Although specific to that district, it gives a useful summary of the process.

It is available online, at

www.nwheritage.org/heritagesite/homes/content/research.htm

A thorough guide is also published by the **Victoria Heritage Foundation**. Similarly, it is specific to Victoria, but gives some useful hints.

It is available online as a pdf file, at:

www.victoriaheritagefoundation.ca/Content/Oct1704_How_To_Research.pdf

Appendix I

NVMA: North Vancouver House Research

The following are genealogical resources held in the North Vancouver Archives.

Building Permits are issued both for main residences and also for any significant additions to or major alterations of a building. Permit indexes for both the City and District of North Vancouver include the legal description.

City of North Vancouver Building Permit Index lists in table form by address information taken from all building permits issued by the City of North Vancouver from 1911 to 1947. It is also cross-referenced by architect, builder and owner. Includes value of work done.

District of North Vancouver Building Permit Index list in table form by address information taken from all building permits issued by the District of North Vancouver from 1922 to 1949.

Plumbing and Drainage Specifications for the City of North Vancouver 1908-1929. Includes name, address and date or permit.

Directories. Directories for North Vancouver for both North Vancouver and the Lower Mainland include listings by both name and address from 1917 to 1996. As there is a time lag occasioned by the gathering and publication of the material, entries for houses built in 1946 (for example) may not appear until 1947. The listing by address also includes such information as employment and marital status. 1917-1924 are on microfilm. The rest are in hard copy.

We also have directories for Moodyville/North Vancouver for most years from 1871-1916. These list only by name, not address.

Voters Lists for the City of North Vancouver from 1908-1990. Some years are missing. Includes name and address of voter. Restrictions apply to the use of these. We have many school records, including school annuals, class lists and other material.

We have an extensive photograph collection which includes information on many houses and their residents.

We have extensive employee records for Burrard Dry Dock during and for a few years after World War II. Access to these is generally restricted to the employee and his or her immediate family.

Our database is on line at www.dnv.org/nvma Use Internet Explorer.

Source:

North Vancouver Museum and Archives
Community History Centre
3203 Institute Road, North Vancouver
604-987-5618/dide@dnv.org or nvarchives@telus.net

Appendix II

WVMA: West Vancouver House Research

Reference Materials

Published materials containing general information on DWV

A Place of Excellence by Bruce Ramsay (1987)
Building the West edited by Donald Luxton (2003)
Place Names of West Vancouver by Peter Hall (2004)
Heritage Policy Recommendations, prepared for DWV by Foundation Group Designs (1988)
Destinations Time Walk web exhibit with heritage walks at www.wvma.net
District web site at www.westvancouver.ca

Published materials for properties of note in DWV

Heritage Inventory prepared for DWV by Foundation Group Designs (1988)
The West Vancouver Survey of Significant Architecture 1945 – 1975, Prepared for DWV by F.G. Architectural & Planning Consultants (1994)
DWV Public Art Inventory compiled by Jayne Shrimpton (2001)

Specific Property Information

Municipal Hall (780 17th St, Mon-Fri 8:30-4:30 pm)
Requires photo ID and written permission of owner

Second floor:

Permits: History cards on individual properties; filed by address
Clerk's: Documents and agreements (e.g. easements, right-of-way, party-to-party agreements) filed by number indicated on Title
Search documents; Council Minutes
Building: House plans; Legal surveys (not registered at Land Titles)

Third floor:

Planning: Files on primary, secondary and support properties on the DWV Heritage Inventory
Engineering: Water cards (utility hook-up dates); Legal Plans (registered with Land Titles); Ortho (satellite) photos

West Vancouver Museum & Archives (650 17th St, Weds-Thurs 1-4:30 pm/Hours subject to change)

Historical and aerial photograph collections; map collection
Clipping files on areas in West Vancouver
Microfiche of *Lions Gate Times*, *West Van News* and *North Shore News* (1926-1993)
"Criss-cross" *BC Directories* (1920, 1921, 1935, 1937-2001)
Fire insurance plans and legend (1930, 1938)
Tax Assessment Rolls (1913 to 1930 currently available)

West Vancouver Memorial Library (1950 Marine Drive, Mon-Sun)

Historical photograph collection
Clipping files on areas in West Vancouver
Books on West Vancouver, heritage, architecture, people, etc.

Other Sources

Person-to-person

Discover and interview previous owners/occupants
Talk to your neighbours and long-time residents
Go to local history presentations that are of interest

Your house

Look for newspapers in pocket doors, wall lining, dates written under wallpaper if doing work—photograph and document!
Look for plaques or other mementos in attic and basement rafters
Research the style of house, the building materials, its fixtures etc.

Related topics to research

Research the history of your area, to provide general background—you may often serendipitously find references to your house or previous owners
Study significant businesses and past residents

The above guide was prepared by Lois Enns, former Archivist at West Vancouver Museum and Archives, for a workshop on researching house history during North Shore Heritage Weekend, September 2004.