

How to Research Your Glen Park House or Building For Free

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This handout is in addition to the excellent PowerPoint Presentation created by Vicky on researching your San Francisco house or building for free. We have given this presentation at the Bernal History Project, The 2016 History Expo at the Mint, The Victorian Alliance; to you today at GPNHP and on August 30th we'll present at the San Francisco History Association.

Our goal is to encourage you to look into and document the history of your house and all of those people who lived there. Each house/structure/building has an amazing history replete with stories to be uncovered. And those stories may go beyond your own house and also include your neighbors as well. You will be very surprised at what you find, once you start looking into the history of your house and its former occupants. Our step-by-step process is an exciting journey of investigation and discovery into your house, building and the people who were there before you. You will have fun doing this - make it fun and enjoy bringing out the history to share with neighbors, friends and family. Don't try to do it all at once - it is a process and that process takes time.

Perplexed by the maze of City agencies, lot and block maps, city directories, Sanborn (fire insurance) maps, newspaper articles, historical photographs, and other resources to researching your house/building? Don't be overwhelmed.

First of all, sit down with a cup of coffee and get organized. This is a step-by step method you can use to get results. This step-by-step method is not the only way to do it - each of us has our own way of seeing, doing and organizing projects. You may take this model and find yourself creating your own method that works better for your particular project. However, the basic steps, guidelines and links are all the same - **start at the beginning and work through the pieces of the puzzle, step-by-step, methodically...asking the who, what, where, when and why questions any investigator or researcher asks at each turn of a page.**

- Step One - San Francisco Property Information Map
- Step Two - Water Tap Records
- Step Three - Sanborn Maps
- Step Four - Photographs and Maps

- Step Five - City Directories and Reverse Directories
- Step Six - and Books
- Step Seven - People and Records
- Step Eight - Misc. Journals and Documents Sites

First of all, you'll need a few supplies to begin your research project and presentation:

📍A computer with Internet access - be prepared to bookmark sites and print pages, screen shots (using SnagIt, Snipping Tool (Windows 7), Screen Shot (Apple) or other screen capturing applications) and photographs

- ↻Some Post-It Notes
- ↻A notepad or two
- ↻A redwell (manila pocket folder)
- ↻A dozen or more file folders
- ↻A Sharpie or label maker device
- ↻A yellow highlighter (or color of your choice - yellow is better for copying purposes)
- ↻A binder and blank label or numbered tabs (to be indexed later)
- ↻A three hole punch to get things into the binder
- ↻Heavyweight Sheet Protectors for photos and exhibits

There are several important websites to bookmark and use often:

📍San Francisco Public Library - <http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=2000305001> - *this is the most important site to bookmark and refer to as it is the SFPL gateway to all of the available resources the library has for researching your house/building.*

📍YouTube Video-How to Research a San Francisco Building at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-TIUB5g7RQ> - How to Research a SF Building

📍Bernal History Project - <http://www.bernalhistoryproject.org/>

📍Glen Park Neighborhoods History Project - <http://www.glenparkhistory.org>

📍OpenSFHistory, a program of the Western Neighborhoods Project, is an important site to use. It has many historical images of San Francisco. A private collector has donated over 100,000 negatives and prints collected over a lifetime that are being digitized and available for viewing on-line at opensfhistory.org.

Doing any research project is like doing a term paper or writing a good book. It takes organization and lots of time and commitment - remember that good writing takes lots of time - and patience in a step-by-step gathering of information and facts that go into the completed project.

You have several options in terms of how to research and present your findings:

- ✓The easiest way is to use the computer and Internet - that is what we are suggesting here.
- ✓You can also visit the San Francisco Public Library History Center and various city agencies and do the research the old fashioned way.
- ✓You can simply write a running narrative of your findings
- ✓You can do a tabbed binder to showcase your findings
- ✓You can do a PowerPointPresentation of your findings
- ✓Build your own house/building-specific website - for example, see:
<http://www.50justin.com/history.htm>

What we hope to give you here are the methods and tools in a handout that you can take with you and refer to any time you want or need to. It is a roadmap to successfully researching your house/building, step-by-step.

You know that if you run into any roadblocks or challenges, Vicky and I make ourselves available to answer any questions you may have.

Vicky can be reached at vicky.walker@gmail.com
John can be reached at jsbmswpi@earthlink.net

This presentation has been put into PDF format as well. With a PDF document, you can access the various sites noted via the hyperlinks included. If there is a URL (universal resource locator - also known as an Internet address) that is not highlighted with a hyperlink that you want to access simply highlight the address and copy and paste it into your Internet browser to access the site.

If you would like me to email you a PDF copy of this presentation, send me a request at jsbmswpi@earthlink.net and I'll gladly send it along to you. Vicky will be posting it to the BHP website in the future as well.

A note about hyperlinked sites you visit. To avoid having to re-invent the wheel, before you go along and visit various sites, set up a folder (like Researching Your House) in your Bookmarks Section of your web browser and save each relevant site you visit to the bookmark folder so you will always have access to that site later.

Let's begin at the beginning and go step-by-step...

Step One - San Francisco Property Information Map

<http://ec2-50-17-237-182.compute-1.amazonaws.com/PIM/> , or you can use

<http://www.propertymap.sfplanning.org>

This will take you to the San Francisco Planning Department **Property Information Map**. Enter the property address in the left side pane and your house will be located on a block and lot map.

To the right is the **Property Report**. Scroll down to the bottom and click on **View Historic Sanborn Map** - save and/or print a copy of this map. Close the Sanborn Map

Click on **View Assessor's Block Map** and save and or print a copy of this map. Note the block and lot number of your house - this is important to know for later research. Close the Assessor's Map.

Click on **Recorded Documents for this property**. Save and/or print a copy of this **CRiis** page. Herein you will find legal filings on the property - this gives you names and dates for future investigation. For instance, there you will find Affidavits of Death, Deeds, Deeds of Trust, Reconveyances, and Notice of Lien and Lien Releases with names to be searched later. Sometimes the records only go back to 1990 but it is a good starting point.

Click on **Show Name Detail** for each entry to access each document. Systematically print each page and use the back button to return to the main **CRiis** screen to continue looking at each document until you have a complete set. Highlight relevant names and dates and put all of the printed pages in a file folder. Then close out Recorded Documents.

On the Property Information Map on the right in Step 2, click on **Printable Version of Reports** and this will generate a useful report to print and save to your file. This report contains all of the information in the various tabs and can be referenced later. Be sure to go through each tab in Step 2 carefully - Property, Zoning, Preservation (Look under

Historic Surveys and see if building was part of the 1976 historical survey - click on Survey field form - or the Junior League Survey), Planning Applications, Building Permits, Other Permits, Complaints, Appeals and BBNs (block book notifications-request by person to be notified of permits on piece of property). There will be useful information contained therein.

In the Assessor's Report section at the bottom of Step 2, don't believe what you see at first glance - carefully research every entry. For example, a house built in 1907 may represent the date the water was initially connected or that date was used because the records were lost or destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire.

For example, on a house that was shown to be built in 1907, later research showed it actually built (tap date=build date) in 1895, not 1907.

Another example is 43 Carver, two Type B earthquake shacks moved up the hill from the Precita Park earthquake shack camp to their current location on top of the hill off Bernal Heights Boulevard. The houses are historic - actually two Certified San Francisco Earthquake Shacks - and so noted on a number of lists and mentioned in many newspaper articles. However, the Property Information Map, while it shows two houses at one address, notes that one was built in 1907 (630 square feet) and the other in 1954 (320 square feet). There is no mention of them being earthquake shacks or that they are certified and genuine.

Under the **Historic Evaluation** section, an earthquake shack/cottage should be noted as such - the parcel number, the building name - *Refugee Shack*, the address, and Planning Department Historic Resource Status - *A - Historic Resource Present*.

Don't take anything you read on the Internet as fact - always verify, research and confirm with backup investigation.

Step Two - Water Tap Records

For older buildings, first check the Spring Valley Water Company (1861-1930) tap records to find out when water service was first turned on to the house.

<http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=2000020401> - this is the San Francisco Public Library Site for the San Francisco Water Department - Spring Valley Water Tap Records 1861-1915, Service Pipe Records, 1915-1937 (microfilm and online volumes).

<http://sflib1.sfpl.org/record=b2727934~S1> - this is the San Francisco Public Library Try Our New Catalog! Page for Spring Valley Water Company records.

<https://archive.org/details/taprecords04spri> (Volume Four)

<https://archive.org/details/taprecords05spri> (Volume Five)

This is Volumes Four and Five of the SVWC Record books. Inside the front cover is an index of streets that each book covers. Find the street name and page number and look for your address. The pages will provide the date of the connection, the name of the customer (builder or owner) and details of service installation.

Some SVWC records are not on-line as yet so you will have to make a trip to the SFPL History Center and look at the record books there.

The water connection date is considered the build date of the building.

For newer buildings, and or if there is no entry in the Spring Valley Water Company records, the tap record can be obtained from the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission by calling 415-551-3000. They will tell you when the water was turned on and for whom. Ask them to mail or email you a copy of the tap record which they will gladly do. That goes into your final presentation.

Step Three - Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

You will need a San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) card to get access to the on-line version of the maps:

<http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=2000028601> (Requires SFPL card to access)

<http://sanborn.umi.com.ezproxy.sfpl.org/>

You can see other versions at the SFPL History Center.

Use the maps to show changes on the property over time.

A list of maps for 1899-1900 can be found at:

<http://www.sfgenealogy.com/sf/sanborn/sanborn.htm>

The Library of Congress link is at:

https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn00813_024

David Rumsey has a pre-earthquake 1905 Sanborn Insurance Atlas at:

<http://www.davidrumsey.com/blog/2011/6/27/pre-earthquake-san-francisco-1905-sanborn-insurance-atlas>

Step Four - Photographs and Maps

The SFPL has photographs (over 2 million with 40,000 on-line) in many different formats and they are all available for viewing at the History Center on the 6th floor at the main library located at 100 Larkin Street (415-557-4567). Some of them that have been scanned are available on-line at:

<http://sfpl.org/index.php?pg=2000305201>

www.sfpl.org/sfphotos

The Assessor's Office (65,000) Negative Collection, 1946-1960), by address and block number, is also available at the SFPL History Center.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) photo-documents work done on street repairs and building structures and those images are at the SFPL History Center in numerous DPW photo albums which are accessible by use of a card system (by street/location) and a request to view them.

The San Francisco Metropolitan Transit Authority has a site with many SFMTA-related photographs which often include neighborhoods and possibly your house or building:

<http://sfmta.photoshelter.com/#!/index>

Also take a look at the Flickr site for SFMTA photos as well at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/sfntaphoto/>

The Robert Durden Color Slide Collection (1950-1990) is also a resource. Robert surveyed and photographed properties in and around the city for about 40 years. These are available for viewing at the SFPL History Center.

For the past 50 years, Professor Emeritus Max Kirkeberg has documented the urban geography of the San Francisco Bay Area in almost 60,000 slides that he personally took. Kirkeberg arrived in San Francisco in 1965 to take a position at the San Francisco State University Geography Department and quickly became enamored with the City. His collection was a by-product of his field classes, walking tours, and related slide lectures of the various San Francisco neighborhoods offered since the early 1970s. These images of streets, architecture, development, landscapes, culture and geographical highlights provide an encompassing picture of the diverse neighborhoods that make up San Francisco, as well as the features and regions beyond it in the greater Bay Area:

<https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/kirkeberg>

Check out the 1938 aerial photos from the David Rumsey collection. You can zoom in with incredible clarity and see what your neighborhood looked like in 1938:

http://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~217219~5504219?trs=166&qvq=q%3A5852.000%3Bsort%3APub_List_No_InitialSort%2CPub_Date%2CPub_List_No%2CSeries_No%3Blc%3ARUMSEY~8~1&mi=0

Don't forget that BHP has photos on its site and Facebook page that you can see and get access to. If you want copies, let Vicky know.

Bernal Heights resident and photographer extraordinaire and aficionado Tony Holiday has for years taken images of various areas of the City he has walked so often. He can be contacted through Vicky.

Other maps and documents to search:

Gift Maps 1-4 (Bernal Heights only)

Cobb Tract

Fairmount Tract

University Mound Tract

Step Five - City Directories and Reverse Directories

Who lived in your house/building? All of the available City directories are digitized and available on-line as well as at the SFPL History Center. The old records are patriarchal so

the man's name is listed (with the (female) spouse's name in parentheses) along with the telephone number and sometimes the occupation of the man. Most directories start in 1850.

<http://www.sfgenealogy.com/sf/sfdirect.htm#General>, and

<http://www.sfgenealogy.com/sf/sfdatadir.htm>

Look up address by name and find the name (and spouse), profession and address. Reverse directories are used to look by address.

Ancestry is a database used only at the library to find historical California voter registration records (Note: current voter registration information, because of privacy concerns, is not disclosed to the general public unless you meet specific legal requirements to have access to it) to search a database based on the address. You must have a SFPL card to access Ancestry at one of the library branches.

BHP has compiled records street-by-street for 1907, 1915 and 1922 and is working on 1890.

Step Six - Newspapers and Books

The Call and the Chronicle (1869 to 1974 and 1985 to the present time) are on-line and accessible. You will need a SFPL card to get access to them through the SFPL Articles and Databases section.

San Francisco Chronicle (1869-present) (SFPL card needed to access):

<http://ezproxy.sfpl.org/login?url=http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/search/nb?p=AMNEWS&t=pubname%3A142051F45F422A02%257CSFCB%21Multiple%2BPublications&b=pubname>

Also see the California Digital Newspaper Collection for searchable archives for The Daily Alta (1949-1891), Elevator (1865-1989), Pacific Appeal (1862-1880), the San Francisco Call (1890-1913):

<http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc>

Local newspapers such as the Bernal Journal and the New Bernal Journal (1964-2012) can be found on-line at the Internet Archives:

[https://archive.org/details/sanfrancisco newspapers?and\[\]=mediatype%3A%22texts%22&and\[\]=bernal&sort=creatorSorter&page=2](https://archive.org/details/sanfrancisco newspapers?and[]=mediatype%3A%22texts%22&and[]=bernal&sort=creatorSorter&page=2)

Vintage issues of the Glen Park News (also known as Glen Park Perspective) back to the late 1970s are also available at the Internet Archive. To learn how to search for a specific term, go to the Other Historic Resources page at GlenParkHistory.org

<http://glenparkhistory.wix.com/glenparkhistory#!other/choa>

Remember that newspapers published real estate transactions so searching them will uncover information about sales and transfers of property by address and the people involved.

Also look for classified ads as an additional source of information.

Search all of the relevant names associated with your house or your neighbors and locate stories that will surprise you.

Step Seven - People and Records

There is a searchable database for several mortuaries that should be reviewed. They have copies of some obituaries pasted onto the documents:

<http://www.sfgenealogy.com/php/sfmrsearch/sfmrabout.htm>

Some funeral home records from 1835-1979 are available by registering on-line at **Family Search (familysearch.org)**:

<https://familysearch.org/search/image/index#uri=https%3A%2F%2Ffamilysearch.org%2Frecapi%2Fsord%2Fwaypoint%2FMJC4-GP8%3A1042889701%3Fcc%3D1385518>

Don't forget to also search the Colma Historical Association for their links to cemeteries as well:

<http://www.colmahistory.org/favorite-links.html>

And don't forget our all-time favorite, **Find A Grave dot com**. You can spend hours browsing on this site and learn a lot about a lot of dead people:

<http://findagrave.com/>

Step Eight - Miscellaneous-Journals and Document Sites

◆Edward's Abstract and Records at the History Center. Deed transfers, building contracts, mortgages.

Building and Engineering News for larger buildings.

All available at the SFPL History Center.

◆World War I Draft Registration Cards and Alien Registration Cards are available on-line by registration at **Family Search**. BHP has collected all cards related to Bernal Heights Addresses and can be obtained from Vicky:

<https://familysearch.org/search/catalog/results?count=20&placeId=206859&query=%2Bplace%3A%22United%20States%2C%20California%2C%20San%20Francisco%22>

<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1968530>

◆For Census Information:

<http://www.sfgenealogy.com/sf/sfdata.htm>

◆Use SF Genealogy.com to find Vital Indexes and Records, 1906 Earthquake Records, Births, Biographies, Books and Magazines, Businesses, Cemetery Lists, Census Records, Churches, City and County Government, City, Social and Phone Directories, Clubs and Societies, Coroner, Deaths, Divorces, Fire Department, Hospitals, Hotel Guests, Land Records, Maps, Marriages, Medical Examiner, Military, Miscellaneous, Mortuary, Naturalizations, Newspapers, Orphans, Photographs, Police Department, Post Office, Prisons, Probates, Real Estate, Schools, Ship Passengers, Voter Registration and Wagon Passengers.

◆In addition, there is also the United States Census Indexes, Immigration, Military, Social Security Death Index and Tax Assessment.

◆Additionally, the United States Federal Census is available through Heritage Quest Online with a SFPL card for access to the database. Census dates available are 1860-1940:

<http://ezproxy.sfpl.org/login?url=http://www.heritagequestonline.com>

◆Block and Lot Books:

One source is the San Francisco Block Book from 1894 and 1901:

<https://archive.org/details/handyblockbookof1894hick>

NOTE: Unfortunately, the entire neighborhood of Bernal Heights is not included in these books.

Once you have the block and lot number of your house, you will have to personally visit the Assessor/Recorder's Office in City Hall to verify information that is not available on-line. Because of privacy concerns, public access to information is limited. You should be able to find out when a building was sold and to whom and by that process establish an historical look at the ownership of the house/building. And, from this search you will obtain names of individuals and families for later researching. You will be able to refine and verify information previously obtained from other sources at this office.

◆ Andrews Real Property Directory for 1949 is also available on-line:

<https://archive.org/details/andrewsrealprope1949andr>

◆ In addition, BHP has links to all Bernal Heights streets in 1943 and 1949 - contact Vicky to obtain them.

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