

# Western Archives

# HOW TO RESEARCH OLDER OR HISTORIC BUILDINGS www.lib.uwo.ca/archives

# **Getting Started**

There are many resources available to you at Western Archives (Archives and Research Collections Centre) to assist in researching a local house or historic building. This guide discusses key published and archival resources that can help you identify the past owners or tenants of a property, as well as when the building was constructed and how it might have changed over time.

There are a few facts about the building that you may want to gather before you start your research in the archives. It is best to review local histories and published architectural resources to explore the topic before delving deeper into archival material. Please bring any information you have which relates to the building, so it can be consulted when doing research.

The resources listed below are outlined in more detail:

- City Directories
- Assessment Rolls
- Fire Insurance Plans
- Architectural records
- Other resources: Photographs; Maps and Plans; Other Archival Resources; Selected Books

Please consult Archives Staff in the Reading Room or look in the Shared Library Catalogue (www.lib.uwo.ca) to search for the material described in this guide. Some resources are accessible only via a staff search of internal listings.

#### **City Directories**

#### London (1856-present)

City directories provide information about the occupant who resides at a property and also their occupation (if known). Prior to 1880 the directories provide an alphabetical listing of names but not the corresponding house number, while later versions will include this information. Most useful is the street section, organized by each side of the street and address number -- so an address can be traced through the





Extracts from London City and Middlesex County Directory, 1893.

years. City directories also contain business listings, advertisements, municipal information, history of community and county sections. Archives Staff can provide instruction on the use of the city directories and the microform readers.

The London city directories are available in the Reading Room for:

- 1856-1961 on microfilm or microfiche;
- 1961-present in book format.

The most recent edition is held on 2 hour loan at the Circulation Desk of The D. B. Weldon Library.

#### **Assessment Rolls**

#### London City (1854-1960)

Assessment Rolls are created for property tax evaluation and contain some or all of the following information: name of occupant and/ or owner, occupation, religion, and age of the head of the household; then the description (lot size, location), assessed value of property and building. An increase in property value from one year to another can indicate when a structure is built on a property or major change to the structure. When Township Assessment Rolls are used they can assist in filling in occupancy or ownership information between available directories and census data.

Please consult the following maps located in the Reading Room prior to reviewing the Assessment Rolls. Use the Ward Maps for the City of London to find the ward that area of the city is located within. The London Assessment Roll books are organized by ward and then as the assessor walked the streets to compile the information. Prior to annexation it is necessary to work with the Assessment Rolls for the surrounding municipalities. The Annexation Map should be used to confirm the date the property was annexed by the City of London, as Assessment Rolls will begin the next year for that area. The best way to search the volume for the property is by street name and lot/address number or owner/occupant if known.

Assessment Rolls are available for the following municipalities, with most available on microform (inclusive dates are given):

- London 1854-1960, originals (1854-1916)
- There are printed London Assessment Rolls for 1916, 1927, 1939, 1953, 1959 and 1966 with the streets arranged alphabetically and then by street number
- Annexed municipalities of London East, London West and also surrounding areas for London Township, 1875-1897 and Westminster Township, 1854-1955
- Township Assessment Rolls are available for many Counties including Middlesex, Elgin, Lambton.

Prior to approximately 1882. street numbers were not usually given as they were not in common use yet. It is best to know the property owners/occupants before working with the Assessment Rolls. This can often be done by going to the Land Registry Office to get a copy of the abstract for the property as it will list property owners. Collector's rolls were used to track the payment of property tax and many of the same types of data are tracked if years are missing for Assessment Rolls.

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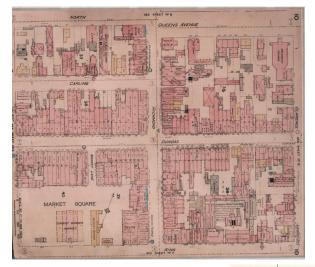
Assessment rolls provide a wealth of information such as occupation, age, Freeholder (owner) or Householder (tenant), owner if different from occupant, size of lot, property and building value. Above: London Assessment Roll, 1860, Ward 5.

#### **Fire Insurance Plans**

#### London (1881 rev. 1888-1958 rev. 1970)

Fire Insurance Plans (FIPs) are urban city maps initially created for insurance companies to provide them with information about building composition and to assess fire risk and assist in assigning insurance rates. These plans provide details on building construction and usage and help give a static impression of streetscapes, neighborhoods and business/ commercial regions. There is a key and color

Ontario Fire insurance Plan Collection



London Fire Insurance Plan, 1881 rev. 1888.

coding on the plans to help identify the type of materials that make up a structure; also the description usually indicates usage of the building for business or commercial purposes. FIPs are excellent resources to help you track major changes a building would have undergone over its lifetime, including renovations, additions or demolitions.



Sheet 29 detail. London Fire Insurance Plan, 1958 rev. 1970.

Due to the amount of research and data gathering required, plans were only updated after major changes in a community.

Western Archives holds FIPs for London as well as most Ontario communities. To verify if we hold FIPs for the community you are interested in please visit our FIP resource guide on our website or contact the Archives Reading Room. The Map and Data Centre also has London FIPs for 1881 rev. 1888 to 1912 rev. 1922 available online.

# **Architectural Plans**

The major architectural collection held by Western Archives is the Murphy-Moore Collection of Architectural Records. The architectural drawings in the collection date from c1850 to 2009 spanning the various incarnations of the firm. This collection contains thousands of plans and drawings of London and Southwestern Ontario area houses, factories, churches, businesses, Western University buildings and well known London architectural landmarks. Be sure to ask the Archives Staff to search the database to see if one of the firm's architects designed the building you are researching.

A few other architectural sources are available such as the Arthur Nutter fonds and the Frank White fonds.

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Victoria Hospital Nurses Residence, Murphy-Moore Collection of Architectural Records, #943.

# Photographs

Western Archives may have photographs of the building or street you are researching. We hold extensive photograph collections including the Ontario Postcard Collection, London Free Press Collection of Photographic

"Locust Mount", 661 Talbot St., built for Elijah Leonard Jr. London Free Press Collection of Photographic Negatives, Sept. 30, 1971.



Negatives and general photograph holdings, plus other resources. Please consult with Archives Staff as we must do a search and retrieve material for viewing. Another approach is using locally published resources for review of pictorial content to see if the building being researched is documented, especially if it is a landmark structure.

# Maps and Plans

Many other maps, plans and atlases are available for research such as: the Illustrated Historical Atlases for counties in Ontario (also online at McGill University), Tremaine's Map of the County of Middlesex, Bird's Eye View maps and Map of the City of London (1856) by Samuel Peters. Other specific plans useful in building research are: Moore block plans for London and Subdivision Plan Books for London. Please consult Archives Staff for assistance in searching for maps and plans. We also recommend visiting the Map and Data Centre on campus to consult their resources.

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Map of the City of London and Suburbs, 1870, CX86.

Map of the City of London by Samuel Peters, 1856, C48.



# Other Archival Sources @ Western Archives

Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee Files (research files – great starting point)

Abstract Book (Land Deeds) for London, 1830-1865

London Building Permit Index, 1908-1926

# Selected Books

Brackets & bargeboards, London : architectural walks in London, Ontario, revised ed. / Julia Beck and Elizabeth Spicer; 1989

Historical Sketches of London : from site to city / Nancy Z. Tausky; 1993.

The Historic Heart of London / John H. Lutman; 1977

The North and the East / John H. Lutman; 1982

The South and the West / John H. Lutman; 1979

Victorian Architecture in London and Southwestern Ontario : symbols of aspiration / Nancy Z. Tausky and Lynne D. DiStefano; c 1986



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