



10 Steps to Researching the History of Your House

By Marian Pierre-Louis
marian@marianpierrelouis.com

Definition

Grantor – the person selling the property

Grantee – the person buying the property

Basic Research Strategy

1. Assessor's Office – Property data

- Access Franklin Assessor Database
- The Assessor's Office will provide links to field/property cards, assessment values and assessor maps. It also provides the most recent book and page number to the deed of your house.
- Franklin Board of Assessors - <https://www.franklinma.gov/board-assessors>
- Franklin Assessor Maps - <https://www.franklinma.gov/gis-department>

2. Registry of Deeds

- <http://www.NorfolkDeeds.org/> - Deeds are indexed by name back to 1793.
- Deeds images are available online back to 1793. Earlier deeds are located in Suffolk County.
- Norfolk County Registry of Deeds is located at 649 High Street, Dedham, MA.
- Search first for yourself as **grantee** and then find the seller who is the **grantor**.
- Next search the indexes for the seller as the grantee and find the previous grantor. Continue this process for as far back as you can go.
- You can also find Norfolk pre-1901 deeds at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2106411>

3. Census Records (also Mass. State Census Records)

- Find the occupants of your house in the census. Please note: the occupants might not be the owners!
- Available from:
 - Ancestry.com (subscription service) <http://www.ancestry.com/>
 - [FamilySearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) (free)
 - [MyHeritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com), [FindMyPast.com](http://www.findmypast.com) and others

4. Probate

- You can find house/estate inventories and list of family members in wills.
- Norfolk County Probate Court is located at 35 Shawmut Road, Canton, MA. Probate records available at this location for 1793 – present
- Pre-1793 probate records are located in Suffolk County.
- Norfolk County, MA Probate Index - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/5656/>
- Massachusetts, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1635-1991 - <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/9069/>

5. Mass. Vital Records

- Provide birth/marriage/death dates and locations.
- Names of parents
- Available from FamilySearch.org, Ancestry.com, www.AmericanAncestors.org.
- *The Record of Births, Marriages and Deaths in the Town of Franklin, MA 1778-1872* - <https://archive.org/details/recordofbirthsma00fran/>

6. Maps

- Ancestry.com, Hathi Trust, www.DavidRumsey.com
- Franklin Genealogy Club links - <https://vbuchanio.wixsite.com/franklinlibgenclub/testimonials>
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps - <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps>

7. Massachusetts Historic Commission Inventory Sheets (State & Local)

- Check database online - <http://mhc-macris.net/> The database contains a complete index of historical properties. Full pdf versions of some may be found at the website.
- Check your local town hall, historical society or library for printed copies of inventory sheets.

8. City Directories & Residents Lists

- City Directories are available online at the major database sites like Ancestry.com
- Resident Lists may be available in Local History Room at local libraries or Town Hall.

9. Tax Records

- Value of property through the years with basic descriptions of buildings or land
- Check your local library, Town Hall or Archive.org for Town Annual Reports which contain the tax records

10. Newspapers

Many old newspapers are available online through Ancestry.com, MyHeritage.com, NEHGS, GenealogyBank.com, Newspapers.com, Boston Public Library, the American Antiquarian Society (Worcester). See <https://theancestorhunt.com/newspaper-research-links.html> for more.

11. Photos and Miscellaneous Items

Be sure to check the Franklin Historical Museum for old photos of your home, old maps and other miscellaneous information.

Further Reading

Blake, Mortimer. *A history of the town of Franklin, Mass.; from its settlement to the completion of its first century*. Franklin, MA: Town of Franklin, 1879. Available at Internet Archive <https://archive.org/details/historyoftownoff79blak>

Hurd, D. Hamilton, *History Norfolk County, Massachusetts*. Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1884. Available at Internet Archive <https://archive.org/details/historyofnorfolk00hurd>

Johnston, James C. Jr.. *Franklin (Images of America series)*. Dover, NH: Arcadia Press, 1996.