

Researching Your Building's History in Louisville

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The first time I walked into the Old Town house that would become my home, holding the real estate listing showing it was built in 1908, I could see that it had been well loved. For me, it was love at first sight. But previous homeowners had obviously loved it in more tangible ways... painstakingly stripping layers of paint to expose the Victorian-style woodwork, carefully patching the solid plaster walls, and resisting the temptation to replace the 1920's light fixtures and the handmade kitchen cabinets. I was curious...who were the families who created and cared for this old house before me? How did they fit into Louisville's early history?

I discovered a few details from my helpful neighbors, who told me the Angells stripped the woodwork and that Mary Gutfelder and family had lived there for as long as anyone could remember. I found clues in the cellar—the coal bin was signed by “L.G.” in 1928, and someone left empty dynamite boxes and a termite-eaten copy of the 1930 Union contract with the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company. But when I started searching for old records and photos, it turned out to be harder than I expected.

My house, like most in Louisville, has not yet been formally surveyed by a professional historian. I followed some standard house-research tips...and ran into a number of dead ends. It turns out that Louisville's earliest building records have been lost, of those that exist few are easily searchable, and some of the best documents are out of town. If your family lived here during Louisville's early days, you too may have experienced some difficulty in tracking down tangible references to their role here.

Happily, if you are interested in researching your home or building's history, there are a number of resources that capture fascinating traces of Louisville's history, and they are increasingly becoming available online and easier to access for non-professionals.

By using these resources, I was able to uncover a wealth of information about my house and its past residents. I found a photograph of both my house and its “mother-in-law” house, owned by Mary Gutfelder in 1948. Looking through the recorded deeds, I learned that Mary Gutfelder not only owned these two houses, but the whole block of Lincoln Avenue which she purchased from Martha and Ludwig Eberharter in 1919.

The Gutfelders – Mary's in-laws, Alois and Josephine – arrived in Louisville in the very first wave of settlers (they are listed with their children in the 1885 census). They moved from Austria and settled in a house on Lafarge Avenue and Spruce Street which they purchased from Charles Welch in 1891. Of their seven children, son Louis was the first to be born in Colorado and he married Mary (nee Putzer) in 1910. Like his father, Louis was a coal miner, and in 1911 (with a group of miners including Tony Fenolia, Nick Thomas, Frank Dalby and Frank & J.A. Carveth) he took out a coal lease in the “Central Coal & Land Company.” His sister Katherine worked as a clerk for the Eberharter's in their general store on LaFarge Avenue in 1916 and around this time Louis and Mary moved to a Lincoln Avenue house—probably mine—where they too raised seven children. In 1930, their house was valued at \$2000 and they had a radio. Their son, Louis, Jr., also worked in the mines, and in the 1932 and 1936 directories he is listed as a City Councilman. In 1940, daughters Loretta and Alice were teachers, Louis, Jr. was the City Clerk, and the house address became, as it is today, 1101 Lincoln.

A more detailed list of the following resources is available at the City of Louisville website on the Historic Preservation Commission's page (www.ci.louisville.co.us/Boards/preservation.htm). While researching, bear in mind that sometimes even official records contain errors, so it is good to try to verify information in another record if possible. Any tips from readers on additional resources would be most welcome.

For more information regarding Louisville’s system of address numbers and how they changed around 1940, see the article “Researching Old Louisville Addresses” in the Summer 2005 issue of this publication (available at the Historical Museum and the Louisville Public Library).

Step 1: Resources Organized by Address:	
<p>The 1948 County Assessor’s Cards and Photos</p> <p>Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, 1125 Pine Street, Boulder, Colorado 80302 (303) 441-3110</p> <p>www.boulder.lib.co.us/branch/carnegie.html (cards and photos not indexed or available online)</p>	<p>In and around 1948, a Boulder County assessor walked the entire town of Louisville, taking photographs and hand noting details of each house and business. Although these cards very nearly ended up in an alley dumpster, they now reside in a back room at the Carnegie Branch Library in Boulder. Go to the circulation desk and ask for your address—keeping in mind that some have changed so you might need to browse through the box containing your street. You should find the owner’s name in 1948 or 1950 (or both), one or two small black & white photographs of the building, a drawn floor plan, a description, the date it was built, and its value. You can even buy a copy of the photo.</p>
<p>The Louisville Historic Building Surveys</p> <p>Louisville City Hall, 749 Main Street, Louisville Colorado 80027 (303) 335-4536 Surveys available at http://www.ci.louisville.co.us/Boards/preservation/buildingsurveyinformation.htm</p> <p>Copies also available at the Louisville Public Library and the Historical Museum</p>	<p>The City of Louisville has commissioned three professional surveys of historic buildings—in 1982, 1985 and 2000—paper copies of which reside at City Hall. To date, only about 170 of Louisville’s historic buildings have been surveyed to any degree of detail, but if yours is one of them, you should be able to find a copy of the standard historical survey form(s) authored by the historian. Most contain architectural details and the names and brief discussion of past residents of the building. The Louisville Historic Preservation Commission hopes to index and improve these records, as well as to survey more homes—which is the first step for homeowners seeking local landmark status and the resulting benefits (tax credits, grants, etc.) available for landmarked buildings.</p>

Step 2: The Boulder County Property Records

First:

Boulder County Assessor
Boulder County Courthouse
1325 Pearl Street, 2nd Floor
Boulder, Colorado 80302
303-441-4830

www.co.boulder.co.us/assessor/E-Map_PRS.htm

(Properties searchable online)

Start with the County Assessor's record of your home or building—they mail it to you every year or you can look it up at the web site—by taking note of the year it was built and the legal description. The legal description will include the block and lot number in one of the Old Town subdivisions.

Second:

iCRIS Database
and document archive

Boulder County Clerk &
Recorder, Recorder's Division,
1750 33rd Street, Suite 202,
Boulder CO 80303 (between
Walnut & Arapahoe)

www.co.boulder.co.us/clerk/recording/search/icris.htm

(Database searchable online;
documents not imaged)

The Boulder County Clerk & Recorder's Office iCRIS database, which lists all recorded public documents, is the best single source to learn past property owners. By starting with the current owner's name, you can run name queries one by one, and follow the chain of sales of your property going back to before the house was built. Look particularly for "warranty deeds" which are the most common method of transferring property and be sure to set the date range back far enough. You may also find marriage licenses for your house's residents while you are searching (I found my own).

Currently, to look at the deeds themselves, you have to go to the Recorder's office in Boulder and order copies.

Step 3: Records Organized by Name

The County Directories

Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, 1125 Pine Street, Boulder, Colorado 80302 (303) 441-3110

www.boulder.lib.co.us/branch/carnegie/html

(Directories not available online)

Excerpted copies of the early Louisville sections of the directories are collected in binders at the Louisville Historical Museum.

The Carnegie library in Boulder has a collection of local directories, some of which were compiled for the entire county and include a separate city listing for Louisville. Alphabetical listings for Louisville appear beginning in 1892.

According to the 1892 directory, Louisville is “a thriving little city of about 1,000 inhabitants...growing rapidly. The principal industry is coal mining... four [of five coal mines] are in active operation...[and n]early all branches of trade, and the professions, have representatives.” You can see that most of the residents were miners, but there are blacksmiths, engineers, physicians and merchants, churches, shops, saloons and the mines. Don’t forget to look at the business ads—you may see some familiar names.

By the 1904 directory, the population had reached 1700 and you will find streets associated with the names.

The 1880-1930 Census Records

The census records are indexed and imaged online at a number of sources. For starters, and if you hold a Louisville Public Library card, try:

<http://nell.boulder.lib.co.us/screens/lsvDbase.html#Proquest>

Nonindexed paper copies of the census for Louisville are on file in the Louisville Historical Museum.

As genealogy researchers know, the US Census records are a terrific source of family history—and are now available online (except for 1890 which was lost in a fire) and searchable by name. When the early census takers walked the two precincts of Louisville (Precincts 19 and 27), they did not record house addresses—and although they did note the streets of the houses they visited, these were only written vertically on the margin of the census forms.

The first census for Louisville, for 1880, is short and the majority of the city’s residents appear to be young, single, male coalminers. The loss of the 1890 census was unfortunate for Louisville historians because it would have shown the city’s earliest families, but a Colorado mid-century census was taken in 1885—and you can see by looking through its few pages that a number of families had by this time arrived in town.

The census records show you the entire family, including children, along with their marital status, occupation, birth dates, and birthplaces. With some of the large families, you can trace their migration to Louisville through the birthplaces of the older children. In most years, you can also see whether the home was rented or owned by the head of household—and in 1930 you can see how much it was worth, or the monthly rent, and whether they had a radio!

<p>“Our Boys and Girls In the Armed Forces, 1943-44” – Louisville’s World War II DVD</p> <p>Louisville Historical Museum 1001 Main Street Louisville, Colorado 80027 (303) 665-9048</p> <p>www.ci.louisville.co.us/museum.htm</p>	<p>If one of your home’s residents served in WWII, there is a good chance they were filmed in front of the house on a film which is available for viewing or purchase at the Historical Museum. An alphabetical list can help you find the place on the DVD where they...and your house...appear.</p>
<p>Museum People Files Museum Collection Records Photograph Collections Obituaries Cemetery Records Local History Books Newspapers</p>	<p>The Louisville Historical Museum, the Carnegie Branch Library in Boulder, and the Louisville Public Library are good places to look for additional information about past Louisville residents.</p>