

**MAKE**

**HISTORY.**

Preserve Manitoba's Past.

## Researching a Heritage Building

PEOPLE ARE DRAWN to old buildings. And why not? Some are beautiful; others are handsome. Even those which have suffered the ravages of time possess a quiet dignity. Of course they are all survivors, and we respect that. It's natural that we honour these structures with care and attention. We might add a coat of paint or carefully restore notable details. Or we can seek to understand a building's history. This last act is especially rewarding, as historic buildings offer us one of the best opportunities to appreciate our past.

Gathering facts about a building—*researching*—is a vital step in any attempt to interpret the social, economic and aesthetic attitudes of earlier generations. Pertinent historical data is occasionally at hand, perhaps in an attic trunk. Frequently, however, this kind of knowledge is held in memories or is submerged in old documents. Getting at these riches can be a daunting prospect. It requires a basic knowledge of the materials needed in building research, as well as a familiarity with the places that house them.

### Research & Information

Research is a means to get closer to the truth, to better understand a subject. Any research project is generated by a question. Certain questions are easy to tackle, with answers directly at hand. Others are trickier, taking days to solve. Moreover, the same question posed in two different projects can result in different research paths. In one case the answer is uncovered in the first source consulted. In another, it requires compiling several pieces of evidence to get the same result. This guide provides a researcher

with the necessary tools to investigate nearly any question posed about a heritage building in Manitoba.

Posing questions about a building is a profitable way to clarify a project's intent. The following questions are commonly asked about a building:

- When was the building constructed?
- Why was it built at that time?
- Who was the original owner?
- What did the owner do for a living?
- Who were later owners?
- Who designed the building?
- Why was this designer selected?
- Who constructed the building?
- Why were these builders chosen?
- How much money did the designer and tradespeople receive?
- Did the designer and tradespeople work on other buildings?
- Have there been changes made to the building?
- Why were the changes made?
- Has the building always fulfilled its present function?
- What materials were used in the construction of the building?
- Why were these materials chosen?
- How much did these materials cost?



- Is the building of standard or unusual construction?
- What did the neighbourhood look like originally?
- Is the building like others in the neighbourhood?

There are three basic categories that can be used as a straightforward organizational framework to group related facts:

### **1. History**

consists of background evidence on original owners, occupations, construction dates, personalities involved and events of significance associated with the building.

### **2. Architecture**

consists of facts on the architect, contractor and tradespeople involved, as well as information about architectural style, design, interior finishes and condition, construction and integrity.

### **3. Context**

places the building in a physical and historical framework. It (a) describes the building's immediate physical environment and (b) compares it with others of its age, type, design, style and condition.

Besides searching, research also involves recording. As you work your way through a source, you will need to write down facts, or photocopy pages. While the actual physical recording, organization and maintenance is up to you, the methods should be simple and rational. Many researchers use cards for recording the data they have collected. These cards are easily transported and are often stored in small plastic recipe boxes. Other researchers prefer to record data on school exercise books or on sheets of ruled paper that are stored in three-ring binders.

It is becoming increasingly common to save information on computers. If you choose the latter, be sure you make more than one electronic version and save a printed copy as well.

Large materials, like copies of maps, have to be stored in a different way — perhaps in poster tubes — but their existence and location should be noted in your primary recording medium. All this evidence must be secured. If your project is a community effort, you ought to preserve it in an accessible location, like a museum, archive, municipal office or local library.

In order to quickly retrace your steps, you need to cite your sources. Citations are references made on your research notes and will include the name of the repository, the name of the source (*The Scratching River Post* newspaper, for example) and any identifying code numbers that narrow the search (typically these are volume numbers). You should also include page numbers wherever possible. If the repository uses reference code numbers, note these as well.

Whatever your preferred recording medium, a common concern must be the adoption of an organizing system: that is, a filing system. A filing system allows you to easily store and retrieve information. Using the organizational framework suggested above (with the categories History, Architecture and Context), it would be a good idea to keep data collected on each category in separate boxes or binders. The information in each would be filed systematically; an alphabetical system is most common.

It is beyond the scope of this publication to suggest how your research might be presented. As has already been noted, research itself can be daunting, with permutations and combinations that cannot be anticipated here. Those twists and turns are part of the struggle and pleasure of the process. Translating all this knowledge into a history, a walking tour or any of the myriad projects that spring to mind can only be left to your imagination.



## Research Sources

This booklet offers some guidance as you start wrestling with the past. This booklet is actually a synopsis of a larger publication, *A GUIDE TO RESEARCHING A HERITAGE BUILDING IN MANITOBA*, that goes into much more detail on all the subjects raised here. Nevertheless, this summary is a good starting point. And if you are so inspired you can pop down to your local library, take out the original tome and dig into the real thing.

We have identified 24 sources that are commonly used by building researchers. Of course, you will not likely need to look at all of these. Some will not be applicable to all buildings. One source might contain the same information as another. Moreover, some sources contain such small amounts of information that only the most tenacious researcher would follow up those leads. We have included those just in case you are one of those kinds of people. A more profitable approach is focus your efforts on those sources that contain the greatest range of information.

### The Building

The building is the first object of inquiry. Examining a building reveals:

- architectural style
- construction techniques and details
- additions and renovations
- date of construction (if there is a date stone or if the style or construction details are specific to a particular time)

### Knowledgeable People

Interviews with present owners, past owners, occupants, neighbours and, if applicable, employees are invaluable in research projects. These people can:

- suggest construction dates
- identify alterations and renovations
- provide social history
- furnish details about original or earlier physical context



All the information required in some research projects is found from talking to knowledgeable people and looking at the building.



## CHRONICLES

### Personal Papers

People's written recollections and correspondence, especially records prepared by architects and builders, can provide unexpected insights into a building's history. Such papers (which are found in libraries, archives, businesses and family hands) can:

- reveal design decisions, construction procedures and building details
- yield construction dates
- identify other people involved in a project
- provide a sense of social activity associated with the building

### Directories

Beginning in 1879, commercial reference directories have identified Manitoba residents, providing building researchers with a wealth of data. The most useful, called *Henderson Directories* yield:

- names of building occupants and owners
- peoples' occupations
- addresses
- construction dates (through a comparison of a series of directories)

### Newspapers

Old newspapers are a cornucopia of historic information. Buildings have always been news and the impressive collections of newspapers (at the Legislative Library, local archives and at some newspaper offices) provide:

- construction dates
- names of owners
- occupations
- names of architects (usually found in "Calls for Tender," notices asking for bids on the proposed construction of a building)
- names of builders
- anticipated cost of construction



Newspapers are particularly rich sources, with a variety of building-related information included. (Legislative Library)



### Periodicals

Periodicals include magazines, catalogues and bulletins, some of which are devoted to informing the public about building issues. Historic periodicals contain:

- design and construction data on large building projects (in magazines)
- design and construction information for small, standardized buildings like houses, schools and barns (in catalogues)
- design and construction updates for specialized building concepts (in bulletins)
- profiles of architects and builders (usually in magazines)

### Institutional Chronicles

Institutions, like churches, railway companies, banks and government departments, produced reports to promote or commemorate their activities. Some of these materials are collected by university libraries, the Legislative Library and some archives. Information that relates specifically to the buildings constructed by institutions includes:

- dates of construction
- building materials
- architectural style
- names of designers and contractors

### Local Histories

Local histories are publications of historic information about a rural municipality or town. The Legislative Library has a complete set; local libraries will have a more limited selection. The building evidence they yield is divided between public and commercial buildings and houses, and includes:

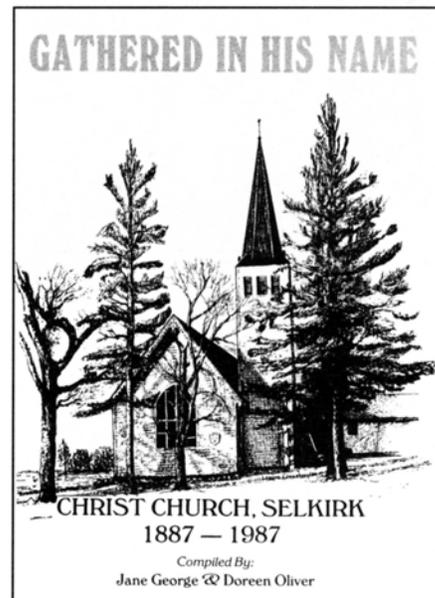
- construction dates
- building materials
- architectural styles
- contextual information (from photographs)

- background on people involved with a building

### Specialized Histories

Academic studies devoted to Manitoba's historical and architectural development (collected in public and university libraries or by branches of government agencies) are useful for providing contextual references needed to place a building in history. The context can be:

- social (people, events)
- economic (wealth or poverty affecting available building resources)
- architectural (designer, builder, style, materials)



Buildings have been a focus for many organizations and institutions. Whether they have sought to improve standards or promote designs, various chronicles (like periodical bulletins and institutional reports) are good sources for data specifically related to architecture. (Legislative Library)



## DOCUMENTS

### Parish Files

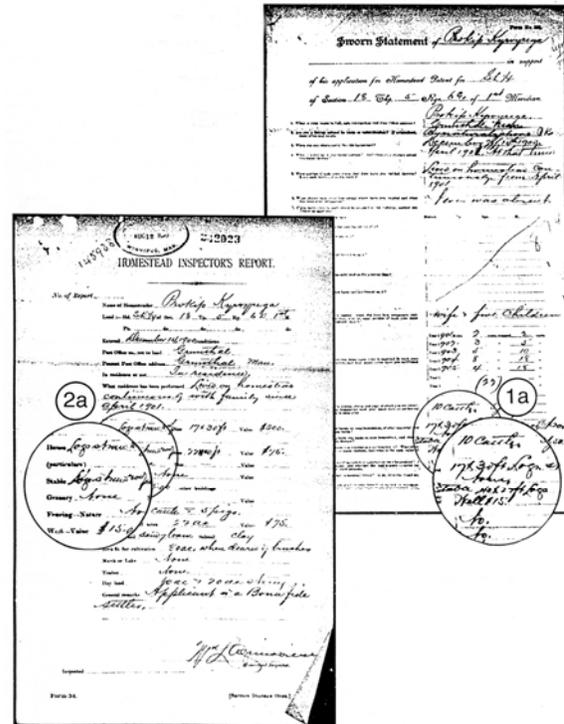
Parish Files are early legal materials defining ownership of river lots (see Parish Plans for information on river lots). These documents (available at the Provincial Archives) are devoted mostly to descriptions of land but do include references to buildings and owners:

- name of original land owner
- information on social and economic circumstances
- details on early buildings on the property (dimensions and materials)

### Homestead Files

This collection of documents (available at the Provincial Archives) was prepared as the greater part of the province was settled in the 1870s and 1880s (see Township Plans for information on that survey). Like Parish Files, these records are descriptions of the land but will also yield data needed for building research:

- name of owners
- occupations
- country of origin
- numbers of family members
- building activity on a homestead (dimensions and materials)



Homestead Files, which may include a Homestead Inspector's Report, are a treasure trove for information on the history of settlement at the turn of the century. (PAM)



### “Old System” Land Titles Records

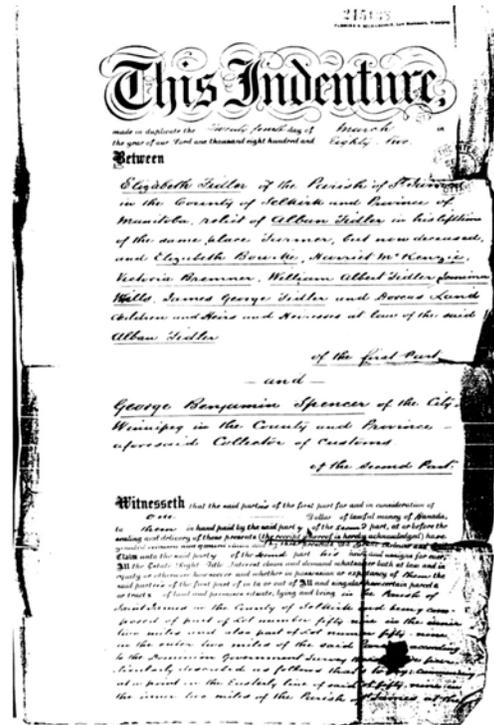
Land in Manitoba is registered in two systems (the Deed or “Old System” and the Torrens or “New System”, discussed below) which are available at local Land Titles Offices, as well as at the Winnipeg Land Titles Office. Documents in the Old System, especially the abstract (abbreviated collections of all transactions associated with one particular property) contain important building-related information:

- name of the owner of the property
- occupation
- legal property description
- financial activities associated with the property
- inferences about building construction (depending on whether property values rise or fall)

### “New System” Land Titles Records

The “New System” of Land Titles recording is focused on one document: the Certificate of Title (accessible at local Land Titles Offices, as well as at the Winnipeg Land Titles Office). Certificates of Title provide some very specific pieces of information for a building research project:

- name of the owner of the property
- owner’s occupation
- legal description of the property
- financial activities associated with the property
- inferences about building construction (depending on whether property values rise or fall)



Certain documents required by governments contain information that is needed in building research. Land Titles materials, like Deeds, Grants and Certificates of Title, identify past owners, occupations, property descriptions and financial transactions. (Winnipeg Land Titles Office)



### Assessment Records

A variety of records are prepared by government authorities as part of the assessment and taxation system (these records are available at municipal offices, the Assessment Division offices of Manitoba Rural Development and at the Provincial Archives). Assessment records reveal a great deal of data for building research:

- names of occupants and owners
- occupations
- religious faiths
- vital statistics about families
- information about livestock
- details about land (size and lot-block-plan number)
- whether there was construction activity
- value of buildings

### Building Permits

Around the turn of the century, in an effort to ensure a level of community safety, civic authorities began to require that builders submit construction plans for approval. Building permits (which might be at civic offices or archives) can be difficult to locate, but are invaluable resources, with very specific building data:

- name of owner
- name of the builder
- name of the architect
- original building name
- very specific information about a building's size and materials
- estimated building cost

### Institutional Documents

Unlike their annual reports (see Institutional Chronicles, above), institutions also produced in-house documents that contain information of use for building research:

- building plans
- contracts with architects and builders
- meeting minute books that refer to buildings

Plans must be filed and approved by this Department before a permit for erection will be granted

No. 611 1a

Application for Permit to Build.

21. 12. 17. Date  
 11/24/17 August 1<sup>st</sup> 1917

To the INSPECTOR OF BUILDINGS:

The undersigned hereby applies for a permit to build, according to the following specifications:

1. Name of Owner. Wm. P. Ross

2. Builder. Ross

3. Architect. Wm. P. Ross

4. Purpose of Building. Warehouse

5. How many floors of building. One

6. How many stories? One

7. Size of Building. Size of building, etc. of feet base. 50 x 90. Height from grade to highest point 80.

8. No. of Stories in height. One

9. Material of foundation. Concrete

10. Thickness foundation. 12 in.

11. external. Plaster

12. party. Plaster

13. Location, orientation, exposure, etc. East

14. Give size of lot. 76 x 13

15. Length of lot. 72 x 16

16. Height of Ceiling. 12 x 16

17. Size of material of Plaster

18. Size of material Plaster

19. How many chimneys? One

20. How many elevations or basins? One

21. What heating? None

22. Estimated cost. 2,000

1917  
 1917

Address. Wm. P. Ross

(Other details under remarks, etc.)

Whether they are preserved by an institution commissioning a project, an architect's office or an archive, technical drawings are an excellent source for evidence of a building's structural system.



## MAPS AND PLANS

### Parish Plans

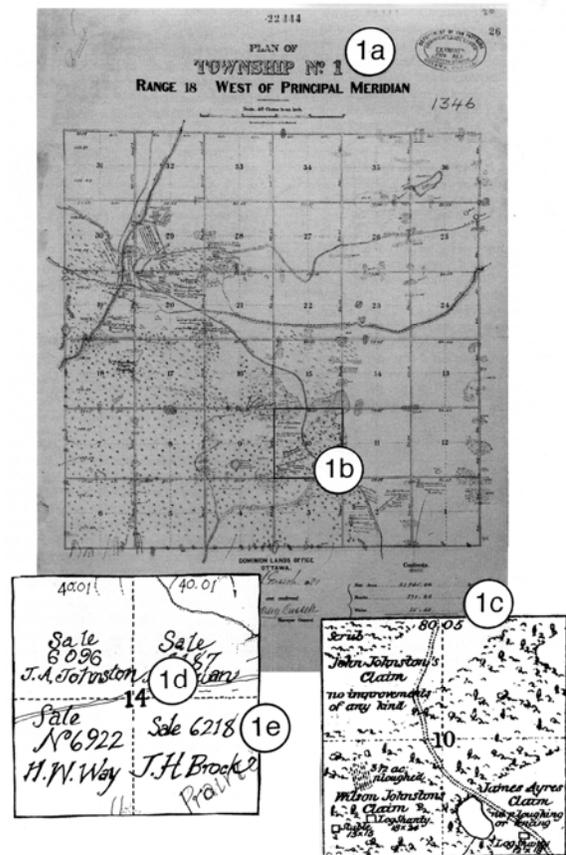
Parish Plans were produced for communities along the Red and Assiniboine rivers to describe property divisions in the river lot system. These plans (preserved at the Provincial Archives) yield a range of evidence needed in building research:

- topography and trails
- original owners' names
- land divisions and measurements
- farming activity and extent
- early building locations

### Township Plans

These records resulting from the 1870s survey of the province into townships are preserved at the Provincial Archives. They provide a number of pieces of information:

- topography and trails
- names of original owners
- land divisions and measurements
- farming activity and extent
- early building locations



Early maps and plans, like this fragment of a Township Plan, show topography, land divisions and evidence of pioneer settlement, including building activity. (PAM)



### Land Titles Plans

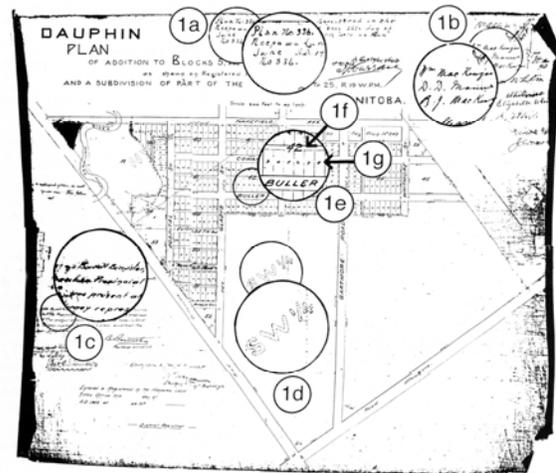
In urban areas, where land was subdivided into small lots, it was necessary for original owners to undertake officially sanctioned surveys, and to have them registered with a Land Titles office (where they are still held). These plans yield a few key pieces of information:

- visual descriptions of property that clarify written legal descriptions
- code numbers that connect to other research sources
- neighbourhood context

### Village, Town & City Plans

Usually compiled from a collection of registered Land Titles plans (see above), these maps were commissioned by civic authorities or produced as commercial endeavours. They may be preserved by civic offices, libraries and museums and contain some useful evidence:

- records of property limits
- visual descriptions of topography
- contextual references placing a property into a whole community
- locations of major public buildings



Historic civic plans are used to put a property (and a building) into an early physical context.



### Fire Insurance Plans

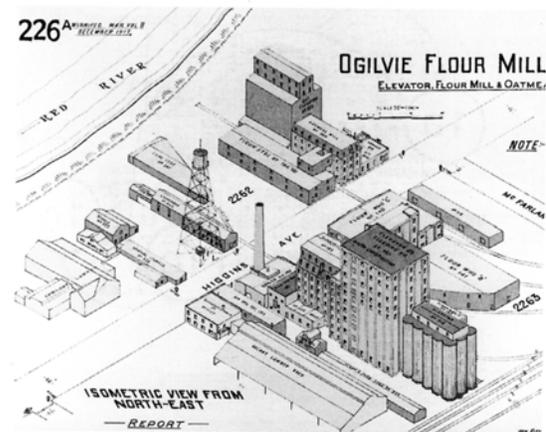
Created for fire insurance companies as records of urban fire risk, these plans are invaluable sources for detailed information on buildings. Collected as a complete set at the Provincial Archives (with more than 70 communities featured, dating from 1917-19), they provide:

- property divisions
- exact building locations
- individual building sizes
- individual building plans
- locations of outbuildings
- construction materials
- neighbourhood context
- changes through time

### Cummins Maps

The only remaining set of these commercial reference guides (from 1918 and 1923) is available at the Provincial Archives. The maps, which describe the whole province, are useful for:

- locating certain public buildings (rural schools, churches and post offices at those dates)
- identifying the names of property owners at those dates



Certain kinds of plans and maps contain images of buildings. Fire Insurance Plans are especially valuable, with individual buildings carefully rendered to reveal a variety of details. (Reproduced with the permission of Insurers' Advisory Organization Inc., who are copyright holders of these plans)



## VISUAL RECORDS

### Photographs

Historic photographs (available at local archives, the Provincial Archives and the Western Canada Pictorial Index) can be used in building research projects for a number of purposes:

- putting a building in its original context
- revealing a building's original appearance
- suggesting the social and economic circumstances of owners and occupants
- suggesting a construction date (when period automobiles and clothing are included)

### Technical Drawings

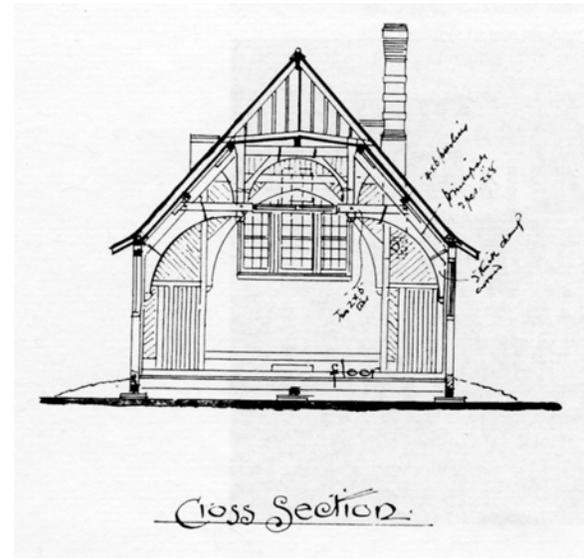
Although only drawings produced for major projects will likely have been preserved, these records reveal a designer's intent, and show:

- architect's name and business address
- building floor plans
- representations of each face of a building (called elevations)
- drawings which show construction details and materials (called sections)

### Illustrations

Very few of these images exist, and usually feature only the most impressive or historic buildings. They can be used to:

- show an architect's proposed design at an early stage
- show original colours
- reveal the original environment



Historic visual materials will enrich any project, allowing you to analyze changes made to a building and to suggest dates of construction and alterations. (PAM)



# Research Question Template

## What To Ask

There are three basic categories that can be used as a straightforward organizational framework to group related facts related to the research of a historic building:

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consists of background evidence on original owners, occupations, construction dates, personalities involved and events of significance associated with the building.

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