Resource Guide for Property History in Sagadahoc County

SPI Surveys – "SPI surveys" is the informal name for two resources produced by Sagadahoc Preservation, Inc. between 1974 and 2004 in preparation for designating two historic districts in the city of Bath. *Historic Resources Inventory for Bath, Maine, 1974-1980* includes one survey sheet for each building in Bath built before 1920. *South End Survey Bath, Maine* includes additional research about many south end houses.

Vertical Files – Vertical Files are files of clippings and other bits of information, organized by subject and surname, including others' research notes. There is a vertical file for most of the streets in Bath. Each street file is arranged by house number. Clippings may include articles about newly built houses, moved houses, fires, and social events at a given address.

City Directories – City directories list people alphabetically by town. Bath, Arrowsic, Georgetown, West Bath, and Woolwich, plus other nearby towns, are represented in our collection. The Bath directory was first published in 1867. House numbers were formally adopted in Bath in 1888 – any house numbers you find before that date are arbitrary and should not be trusted! Street number directories are included in each directory beginning in 1902.

Maps – Our collection of framed wall maps indicate the location and owners of Bath properties from about 1835 to 1898. The 1858 *Map of Sagadahoc County, Maine* indicates property owners in each town center. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps indicate building footprints and construction materials in populous areas. Sanborn maps of Bath, from 1890 to 1950, are available online through the Library of Congress.

Bath Tax Assessor Database – Property records which reference current and recent deeds are searchable by address at http://gis.vgsi.com/bathme/

Deed Database – County deed databases provide access to historical deeds online. Visit the Sagadahoc County Registry of Deeds website and select *Public Search*. Recent deeds are indexed by *grantees* (buyers) and *grantors* (sellers). Before about 1900, deeds are indexed by *Book and Page Number* only. Sagadahoc County was part of Lincoln County until 1854. Copies of Lincoln County deeds are available in the Sagadahoc County database. Visiting the Registry of Deeds at the Sagadahoc County Courthouse is also a great option.

Tax Records – Tax records reflect the value of a property, and changes in value resulting from a new build, addition, fire, or tear-down. Bath real estate tax records are available on microfilm back to the mid-1800s. Original Arrowsic tax records are also available. Note: some changes in value are the result of economic shifts. Compare your property to other properties on the page to identify economic patterns.

Fotocive – Photograph collections are indexed in Fotocive, which patrons may search on request. Houses are usually indexed by street name or family name. Businesses are usually indexed by past business name or owner. Street scenes showing buildings at oblique angles are more common than photos of a single building façade.

MC-007, Robin Haynes research papers about downtown Bath – Commercial buildings in downtown Bath are well-documented by this digital collection. Patrons may view the Haynes research papers on request.

Manuscript Collections – Family papers, research papers, and business records may include clues.

Fire Department Records – Some records of the Bath fire department are available, but they are not indexed by location.

Genealogy Resources – Understanding family connections can help answer questions about tricky property transfers. See our research guide about genealogy resources for more info.

Research Method for Dating a Building

When was my house built? Who built it? Who lived there? Follow the steps below to answer these questions.

1. Find out whether someone else has already done the research.
   - Is there a plaque on the house issued by Sagadahoc Preservation Inc.? If the house has a plaque, ask SPI for the research file.
   - Is the house in Bath? Look in the **SPI Surveys** for the survey sheet.
   - Check **MC-007** for research notes (downtown Bath buildings only).
   - Check the **Vertical Files** for research notes.
2. Gather a list of names associated with the property.
   - Look up the address in the **City Directories** and note names.
   - Locate the house on the different **Maps** and note names.
   - Bonus: use **Genealogy Resources** to learn more about those folks.
   - You will use these names to keep yourself on track during deed research.
3. Look for changes to the footprint.
   - Compare the building footprint on the different **Maps.**
4. Deed research: build a chain of title.
   a. Identify any pre-1900 deed as a starting point.
      - Search the **Bath Tax Assessors Database** or ask your town's tax assessor for the most recent deed
      - Search the **Sagadahoc County Deed Database** by any recent owner name
   b. Read the deed
      - Verify the property description
      - Note the *grantor* (seller)
      - Note the *grantee* (buyer)
      - Note the *date*
      - Note the *type* of deed
      - Note the reference to the prior deed (*Book and Page Number*, *date*, *grantor*, *grantee*)
   c. Use the referenced *Book and Page Number* to search for the prior deed
   d. Repeat steps b and c until you find a deed for the property with <u>no buildings on it</u>
5. Pinpoint the year built
   - Who purchased the property with no buildings on it? Look them up by name in the **Tax Records** from the year they bought it to the year they sold it.
   - What year did the taxes go up? That's likely the year it was built.

Tips:

- Deed research can be tricky and confusing. Keep a spreadsheet or table of grantees, grantors, dates, and Book/Page numbers. Study the types of deeds: warranty, mortgage, and quitclaim. Sketch property boundaries and note changes. Research family and business connections.

Research Method for Finding Evidence of the Historic Footprint and Design Features

When was the addition put on? What were the original finishes? Are there photographs? Are there plans? Evidence helps building owners get approval and support for improvements, preservation, and restoration efforts.

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   - Is the house in Bath? Look in the **SPI Surveys** for the survey sheet.
   - Check **MC-007** for research notes (downtown Bath buildings only).
   - Check the **Vertical Files** for research notes.
2. Look for changes to the footprint.
   - Compare the building footprint on the different **Maps.**
3. Look for commercial advertisements in the **City Directories.**
   - Advertisements might include renderings of commercial buildings.
4. Gather a list of names associated with the property.
   - Look up the address in the **City Directories** and note names.
   - Locate the building on the different **Maps** and note names.
   - Bonus: use **Genealogy Resources** to learn more about those folks.
   - You will use these names to search **Fotocive** and other collections.
5. Search **Fotocive** for photographs.
   - Use street names, surnames, and business names as keywords.
   - Photos of a single façade are rare; street scenes are more common.
6. Ask the reference librarian to search the collections for **Manuscript Collections** related to past owners.
   - Look for photographs and correspondence related to the building.
7. Finding plans.
   - Refer to the **SPI Surveys** for an estimated construction date.
   - Browse books in the 720 call number range to learn about significant buildings.
   - Read *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine* to identify architects who practiced at the time.
   - Collections of architect's plans are often found at other archives. The reference librarian can help you search for specific architectural collections.

Tips:

- Not all buildings had a set of plans. Many houses were derived from architectural pattern books by experienced builders.
- The reference librarian cannot advise patrons on planning board applications or preservation projects.