

How to Research Your Home in Holyoke, MA

Every house has a story to tell and uncovering that story is like a treasure hunt. Take the time to sift through the records, and the history of your property will slowly unfold. You will come to learn more about the history of the structure, its residents, and its role in a larger neighborhood story.

1. **Determine what research has already been completed on your property.**

If your house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, thorough research is on file with the [Massachusetts Historical Commission](#) or [Holyoke Historical Commission](#). Check the Massachusetts Cultural Resources Information System (MACRIS) at mhc-macris.net to see if your property is included. If it is, you can download the property's nomination form. If your home is located within the [Fairfield Avenue Local Historical District](#), the Holyoke Historical Commission may have specific information on its architecture and history.

2. **Determine an approximate date of construction for your property**

- a) Start your research at home, using what you already have. Your house's architectural style and building material can give you hints about its past. Use an architectural field guide such as Virginia and Lee McAlester's *Field Guide to American Houses* to identify features that may reveal a date range in which your house was built.
- b) Consult historic maps and atlases. Maps are a great way to determine an approximate date of construction. Search for a map on which your building does not appear and then the first subsequent map on which it does appear. The years between the publication dates of these maps will most likely be the time period in which your property was constructed. See the list below for Holyoke maps and repositories at which you can see them.
 - [Holyoke Public Library History Room](#) - Insurance Maps of Holyoke, Sanborn Map company, L.J. Richards and Co. 1911 (413-420-8107)
 - [Wistariahurst Museum Archives](#) - Located in the Carriage House on the museum grounds. Call 413-322-5660 ext. 5169 to make an appointment to visit

3. **Create a chain of title for your property**

A chain of title is the progression of a property's ownership from the present to the original owner. The first step is to determine the property's plot and lot number.

- a) Visit the [City Assessors web page](#) or office on the first floor of Holyoke City Hall
- b) Visit the City's online [Property Viewer](#), put in your property street address and search. If your property comes up, click on the map and you will see what information the city has on your property.
- c) On the same screen click on the Property Record Card link for your title information.

4. **Deed Research**

Deeds are the legal documents that record land transfers. Find the deed for the most recent transaction by using the Book and Page numbers listed as the Legal Reference on the Property Record Card. This deed will represent the transaction between the current and most recent property owner.

Holyoke land transactions are recorded at the Hampden County Registry of Deeds in Springfield. Every recorded real estate document in Hampden County from 1950 to present is available online by searching the [Hampden County Registry of Deeds online database](#). For documents before 1950 you will need to visit the Registry of Deeds on the 4th floor of the [Hampden County Hall of Justice](#), 50 State Street, Springfield. To minimize your research time, make sure to bring all your information including lot number, names, and dates. There is a charge to make photocopies.

The location of deeds recorded prior to 1889 can be found in one of two ways:

- a) Typically, each deed will reference the previous transaction and correlating deed, book, and page numbers.
- b) If no book and page numbers are listed use the 'GRANTOR/GRANTEE' index to find where a transaction was recorded.

5. **City Directories**

City directories are similar to today's phone books. They list the city residents and businesses and their corresponding addresses. Directories are great source of information and will provide insight into the building, the neighborhood and its residents over time. You can learn, for example if the building was a single-family home or contained separate apartments. Who owned and/or who rented the property and what their occupation was. City directories can be found at the [Holyoke Public Library History Room](#).

6. **Census Records**

The U.S. Census has been taken every 10 years since 1790. U.S. Census are available online at ancestry.com or at the [Holyoke History Room](#) with your library membership. The range of information offered by census differs depending on the year. Among other things, you can gain insight into whether the building is being owned or rented, the value of the house, the number of household members and their occupation, age, race or place of origin.

7. **Newspapers**

Newspapers have the potential of offering a wide range of information. Anything from an advertisement for the rent or sale of your property to the obituary of one of its residents. Be creative in what you search for and how you connect the dots. To save time, try to zero in on a date range. The Holyoke Transcript-Telegram is on microfiche at the [Holyoke History Room](#).

8. **Probate Inventories**

Probate inventories are a great way to learn more about your building's interior. The individual's possessions are listed in the order they were found and often the room in which they were found. From this you gain insight into the number and type of rooms within the house. Compare this to your property's current floor plan and discover what has changed. Probate inventory is the complete listing of the property owned by an individual at the time of their death. Check the [City Clerk's office](#) or [Hampden County Registry of Deeds](#).

9. **Building permits**

Building permits record physical changes made to a property including new construction or changes to a pre-existing structure. Some building permits are kept in the [Holyoke Building Department](#) located in room 300 of City Hall Annex, 20 Korean Veterans' Plaza.

10. **Water Department**

The [Holyoke Water Department](#) may have records of when water service was started at your property.

Words of caution:

- Some street names and numbers have changed over the years, so the exact location may have had another name or number.
- Your current information may be wrong, some past information may be wrong, try to document the information that you have with copies/images of the original documents. The stories that you heard from Uncle Joe may not have been right after all.

Another option to researching your historic home is to pay for it. There are some researchers who will do the job for a fee.

[Holyoke Historical Commission](#)

[Local Historic District Commission](#) (Fairfield Avenue Local Historic District)

Holyoke City Hall Annex

20 Korean Veterans Plaza

Holyoke, MA 01040