



Researching Heritage Properties

A Guide to Historic Properties Research in Olympia

Tracing the history of place can be fun and enlightening. Whether you are already a historic property owner, considering a purchase, or just curious, revealing the history of a place will give you a deeper appreciation for place and time. You can reveal information about how and when a place was constructed or created, and by whom; about those who lived or worked there, and the architectural style and the design influences that shaped it. Your research can also uncover facts about related people and events, shedding light on the history of the entire community.

Research is easier and more accessible than ever with the vast resources now available on line, in addition to traditional research resources like the assessor's offices, archives, and libraries. This page provides guidance in getting started and tips for going more in-depth.

As you learn, you can track your findings in the attached form to establish and document the heritage characteristics of your property, for your own reference and for future owners and researchers.

Start with the Basics

Thurston County Assessor's office's property search: <https://www.co.thurston.wa.us/assessor/process-Aplus.html>

Find essential, basic property information through the Assessor's property records. If you are the property owner you can also find much of this information in your tax bill. The information to record from this initial research includes the **parcel number, legal description, and dates of construction**. For very old properties, structure date information may not be entirely reliable. The **history of ownership** may also be found here. With this basic information in hand you can begin to research the historic significance of your property.

Historic Property Listings: Your property may already be recognized and designated as historic. There are four categories of heritage designations in Olympia, detailed in *Table One*. They include National Register, State Register, Olympia Heritage Register Individual Listings, and Olympia Historic Districts. Additionally, there are non-official listings or inventories of properties that *may* be historic or have local significance, and which *could* be candidates for heritage register listing. Two of these lists are also included in *Table One*. On line sources for these register listing follows the table.

Table One – Historic Property Designations and other Property Listings

Listing Level	List Includes	Process for Listing	Benefits/Restrictions
National Register of Historic Places	Properties of national significance, determined through a comprehensive survey certified by a professional.	City Heritage Commission can recommend listing. Except for publicly owned property, inclusion on National Register is voluntary on the part of property owners.	Benefits may include some tax benefits. Property owners must consult with City prior to making certain alterations.
Washington State Heritage Register	Properties at least 50 years old that retain original character and are historically significant at local, state or federal level.	Owner must consent to listing on the State Register. National Register listings are automatically added to the State Register.	State listing does not constrain the owner in any way.
Olympia Heritage Register	Olympia properties, sites and districts that have significant historic or architectural value to our community.	Individual listing on the local register is voluntary with property owners.	May be eligible for certain tax benefits. City approval is required for certain exterior alterations.
Olympia Historic Districts	Olympia has three National Historic Districts and two Local Historic Districts.	Petitioners representing at least 50% of property owners in a proposed district consent to listing, and the district and its historic value are documented.	District listed properties have same designation level as individually listed properties (above). May be eligible for certain tax benefits. City approval required for certain exterior alterations.
County Inventory	Inventory of significant properties completed in 1985.	Includes property info but does not evaluate historic significance.	
State Survey	2011 State survey of all properties over 50 years old, with info taken from tax assessment records.	The State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation holds this information in their WISAARD database. No historic designations.	

Research Resources

City of Olympia: <http://olympiawa.gov/city-services/historic-preservation.aspx> Interactive Map of Olympia Heritage Register Properties and Districts. Click on the property for information. Click on “View Property Detail” to access detailed property descriptions. Properties in Olympia Historic Districts do not typically have detail; click on “View District Report” to find brief descriptions of individual properties within the District Listing.

National Register: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm> Includes guidance for searching for properties listed for their national significance.

State Register/WISAARD: <https://fortress.wa.gov/dahp/wisaardp3/> The State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation WISAARD database is searchable by address, tax parcel number, and other criteria. The WISAARD database should include all properties on the national, state and local register, but may not include all properties in local inventories, surveys, or other lists. It contains links to photographs, inventory sheets when available, and other information. Tip: after accessing the main WISAARD site, click on the Search tab, then Property, then Filter Search. It is most reliable to search by parcel number but you can search by address or other known information. Spend a few minutes clicking on all the results for your property as there may be multiple documents and reports available.

State Archives: <https://www.sos.wa.gov/archives/> Our State’s Southwest Regional Archives is located in Olympia and provides support for local research. Archives has historic photographs and assessor’s cards up to 1938 and can share these via email. Contact them with the address or tax parcel number you wish to research: swbrancharchives@sos.wa.gov . For more in-depth research and assistance, make an appointment to visit.

Olympia Historical Society: Olympiahistory.org The Olympia Historical Society and Bigelow House Museum has an extensive bibliography of print, on line, and photographic resources. The Society also has a query form you can use to ask specific questions about your property or other aspects of local history. In addition, the site includes *Where are We:* <https://olympiahistory.org/map-welcome/> an interactive map with over 500 properties of historical significance in our city, and clickable links to the page associated with each site.

Olympia Genealogical Society: <https://olygensoc.org/> The genealogical society can help find information on who lived in a home or property, how they made their living, and sometimes how to contact descendants. The library has extensive resources available both on paper and on line. They hold regular Genealogy Cafes at the Olympia Timberland Library.

Architectural Styles: <https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/historic-buildings/architectural-style-guide> If your property has an inventory sheet, is on a register, or is listed in *Where Are We*, you will generally find a description of its architectural style. The DAHP website cited here is an excellent descriptive guide to various architectural styles that exist in our state.

Additional resources available both on-line and in print:

Joseph Wohleb Drawings. Special Collections, Allen Library, University of Washington. Call (206) 543-1929 for hours or operation. Resource: Material for in-library use only; photocopies and prints.

Olympia Timberland Library (OTL), 313 8th Avenue SE, Olympia, WA. Phone: (360) 352-0595. Hours vary. Resource: Clipping files, city directories, genealogy collections, maps.

Thurston County Assessor's Office (TCAS), Building 1, First Floor, Room 127, Thurston County Courthouse, 2000 Lakeridge Drive SW, Olympia, WA 98501. Phone: (360) 786-5410

Thurston County Auditor's Office (TCA), Building 1, First Floor, Room 126, Thurston County Courthouse, 2000 Lakeridge Drive SW, Olympia, WA 98501. Phone: (360) 786-5224.

Thurston County Clerk (TCC), Building 2, Room 136, Thurston County Courthouse, 2000 Lakeridge Drive SW, Olympia, WA 98501. Phone: (360) 786-5410.

Thurston County Coroner (TCCO) Building 3, Lower Level, Thurston County Courthouse, 2000 Lakeridge Drive SW, Olympia, WA 98501. Phone: (360) 786-5529.

Washington State Library (WSL), 6880 Capitol Boulevard South, Tumwater. Hours limited; recommended to call ahead: (360) 704-5200. Resources: City directories, general histories, biographical files, census records, death records, photographs, pictorial works, manuscripts.

Washington State Historical Society Research Center (WSHS) Tacoma, phone: (253) 798-5915. Access to research center by appointment only. Resources: Photographs, maps, manuscripts.

Washington State Archives, Southwest Region, 1129 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA 98501. Phone: (360) 753-1684. Resources: Assessor Field Books, Public Grantee/Grantor records.

Documentation of Property Research

Date: _____ Research Completed by: _____

Property Address: _____

Current Property Owner: _____

Tax Parcel Number: _____

Historic Designation, if any:

- National Register (name and number):
- State Register (name and number):
- Local Register (name and number):
- Inventory or survey (source and number):
- Other:

Assessor's Records Information: (Caution: this information may not always be accurate)

Date Built: _____ Date Remodeled: _____

Picture Number (*from Assessor's Field Books*): _____

Other Notes and Information: _____

Previous Owners:

Name	Dates
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Notes:

Title Report or Title Company Records: *(Generally arranged chronologically and by legal description, but it varies by business.)* Some commercial title companies will allow you to do historic research in their records, others may not. Call in advance. Search backwards from current owner. Note: 'Grantor' is seller, 'Grantee' is buyer.

Public Grantee/Grantor Records: *(Arranged chronologically.)* Thurston County Auditor's Office Records Section (360) 786-5405. All records are on microfilm. Ask staff for help.

Chain of Title:

Name	Date	Instrument (Mortgage)	Value
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____