

# RESEARCHING TACOMA'S BUILT HERITAGE



## Getting Started

The City of Destiny has also long been known as the City of Fine Homes. An abundance of these fine homes survive today; from grand mansions of the 1880s, simple but elegant bungalows of the 1910's, to Spanish Mission stucco houses of the 1920s. According to U.S. census figures, nearly 50% of Tacoma's homes were built before World War II.

So how do you discover the history of your house? Can you determine who built it, and when and why? Although you may not find an old photograph of your house, and the chances of locating architectural plans are slight, many facts can be uncovered. The following sources available in the Northwest Room can lead you to answers.

### Tacoma-Pierce County Buildings Index

(<http://cdm17061.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p17061coll1>)

This comprehensive source indexes home construction news in Tacoma newspapers from 1883 through 1963. Look up your address to see if your house received newspaper coverage during its construction. It will list the architect, contractor and building style for your address, if known. It will indicate if architectural plans for your house are known to exist. It indexes the Tacoma Public Library photography collections for photographs of Tacoma homes. It may even reveal a murder, suicide, party, wedding or other "event" that took place in your house. The Tacoma/Pierce County Buildings Index also indexes over 200 books related to Tacoma architecture or history.

### The Tacoma Neighborhoods Index

A guide to information about greater Tacoma area neighborhoods, subdivisions, additions and housing projects. Important histories of our area include: *History of Pierce County* by W.P. Bonney, *Tacoma; Its History and Its Builders* by Herbert Hunt and *South on the Sound* by Murray Morgan.

### Tacoma Cultural Resource Survey

The City of Tacoma's Historic Preservation Department surveyed Tacoma's neighborhoods for historic properties in 1982. Look up your address for a listing. A separate survey of the Hilltop neighborhood was completed in 1993.

## The Northwest Room

Located in the Main Library's original 1903 Carnegie Library, the Northwest Room is home to an extensive collection of material on Tacoma and the Pacific Northwest and genealogy, including books, photographs, newspapers, manuscript collections, unique online resources, and much more. Visit us to research your Northwest history project, find information about your older Tacoma home, view thousands of local photographs and postcards, and research your family tree.

### Northwest Room

#### Main Library

1102 Tacoma Ave South  
Tacoma, WA 98402  
253-292-2001 ext. 1605  
[www.tacomalibrary.org](http://www.tacomalibrary.org)  
[nwr@tacomalibrary.org](mailto:nwr@tacomalibrary.org)

### Hours

Monday: Closed  
Tuesday: 11am – 8pm  
Wednesday: 11am – 8pm  
Thursday: 9am – 6pm  
Friday & Saturday: 9am – 6pm  
Sunday: Closed

## Digging Deeper: Researching Tacoma's Built Heritage

### Tacoma City Directories

R.L. Polk's city directories list the residents of your house. Occupations are also usually listed. The first directory was published in 1885. Spouses are listed starting in 1911. Cross-referencing by address started in 1928.

### Image Archive

(<http://cdm17061.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p17061coll21>)

Street scenes, aerial views, and other photographs are an invaluable source for neighborhood history. You can search our online Image Archive for images of your neighborhood.

### Tacoma-Pierce County Obituary Index

(<http://cdm17061.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p17061coll3>)

A home is more than bricks, wood or mortar. Who were the people that lived in your house? What brought them to Tacoma? Consult the Tacoma-Pierce County Obituary Index at the Tacoma Public Library to see if a former resident is listed. Relatives of former occupants can sometimes be located from information found in obituaries. They may even be willing to share old photographs of your house with you.

### Local History & Biography Index

(<http://cdm17061.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p17061coll12>)

Find general news articles on local individuals and companies. Your home's architect or contractor may also be listed. What other buildings did they design in Tacoma? What was their training? How prominent was their practice? Were they known for a particular style?

### Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

Sanborn Maps outline structures block by block for most of the city. Consulting maps for different years may reveal additions or remodeling that took place. You may also discover that your house previously went by a different address. Studying the history of your street, your neighborhood and your city will help "flesh out" the story of your home. Was it built near a streetcar line? What schools and churches did local residents attend? Were all the houses on your street built at the same time?

### Newspapers / Clipping files

Articles cited in our indexes are available on microfilm in the Northwest Room. We have Tacoma daily papers from 1883 to the present, as well as several smaller run Pierce County and regional papers. Clipping files contain article clippings arranged by topic. The files are organized alphabetically by subject in the Northwest Room.

### Manuscript Collections

These discrete collections of papers and records collected by local individuals and organizations uniquely speak to the history of our area. Finding aids to the Northwest Room's growing collection of manuscript collections can be found online via ArchivesWest (<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/>).

**There's more! You'll find books and journals, school yearbooks, maps & atlases, and a large genealogy collection with various record indexes for continuing to research the lives of architects, former occupants, and neighbors.**



TPL Image Archives #TPL1975-1.63

## NEED MORE HELP?

Northwest Room staff is available. Just ask!

- 253-292-2001 ext. 1605
- [nwr@tacomalibrary.org](mailto:nwr@tacomalibrary.org)