

Research Your Old House in Charlestown

Your home has a story to tell. Find out when your home was built, who built it, who lived there and how they changed it.

Tracing the history of an old house can be a challenging – yet fascinating – journey. Anyone who takes this challenge on will be greatly rewarded.

The first step in compiling a home's history is to identify the era in which it was built. Luckily for homes in Charlestown a lot of the preliminary research has been done and could be waiting for you in the *Historical Reference Collection* at the Charlestown Branch Library, or in the Charlestown Preservation Society's publication: *Charlestown History and Architecture: A Guide for Homeowners, Residents and Visitors*

This guide will suggest a path to follow when gathering your information. Before you begin, familiarize yourself with the following facts and tips:

- June 17, 1775. Charlestown Burned by British during Battle of Bunker Hill. No buildings in modern Charlestown date prior to this day... your house is newer than 1775! **Pro Insight: There is some small evidence that a few buildings down near the neck (Sullivan Square area) may have survived the battle and parts of those could have been incorporated in the rebuilding, but to date there is no concrete proof.
- Jan 5, 1874. Charlestown was annexed by Boston, Suffolk County. Prior to this it was located in Middlesex County, MA
- On deed and title records the Grantee is the person acquiring the property, and the Grantor is the person selling or giving away the property.
- Some street names and numbers have changed over the years in Charlestown. If you come across that in your deeds double check the info against a year appropriate map just to make sure you are still on the right track.
- Keep detailed notes and a cheat sheet! We've included examples for the various kinds of investigations. You will need this information should you choose to apply for a Historic Home Marker, available through Charlestown Preservation Society and it will make it easier to keep your documents in order.

Begin your search with the *Charlestown Historic Resource Study, 1981*.

If your home is included in the study, you'll find a lot of information like original owners, the builder, history and architectural details.

Online: search the [MACRIS](#) database for your property. The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) is a database of Building Inventory Forms compiled by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) with information on historic properties and areas in the Commonwealth. Consulting MACRIS will tell you if your property has a Building Inventory Form, and if so it will be available in the Charlestown Library. MHC continues to scan and make inventory forms viewable online, but most results will just include a property's address and a snapshot of essential information. If your property is listed, follow the instructions below to view and copy your form.

In Person: Head over to the Charlestown library and ask for the Charlestown Historic Resource Study. The forms are catalogued by street name, then number. Sometimes they are grouped into a set of numbers, like Monument Ave 15-45. If your home address is say... 31, then this sheet covers your home because it is an odd number, and sits within a long row of similar properties. If your home is #44, then keep looking.

Next Steps: Documenting your old home

If you do NOT find an inventory form, or if your form suggests “more research is needed,” or lists a c or “circa” in front of the date built, don’t worry... keep going, we promise it’ll be worth it! Simply trace the chain of ownership of your property back through time to the original owner and its build date.

Locate your properties historic deeds. Both online AND in person at the Suffolk County Registry of deeds, locate your properties historic deeds. Start a [cheat sheet](#) (link to printable copy) noting the date of property transfer, the name and occupation of the grantee (person who is purchasing or receiving the property,) the cost of the transfer and whether it was mortgaged or not, the name of the grantor (the person selling or transferring the property,) the book and page number where the current deed can be found, and then the date, book and page number that it references as the previous deed. Also, make note of any handwritten notes in the margins. ****Pro Tip:** Only the oldest deeds for the property are needed for your plaque application, but for sake of completeness, instructions for researching back from the current property owner are given.

Online: For current property records back through 1973, go to the website www.masslandrecords.com click on “Suffolk County” then search for your property’s deed using your address by clicking on “Search Criteria” then “Property Search.”

← → ↻ ⓘ www.masslandrecords.com/Suffolk/ ☆

[Search Home](#) [Search Criteria](#) [Search Options](#) [Search Help&Support](#) [FAQ](#) [Basket](#)

masslandrecords.com
Suffolk Recorded/Registered Land

Street #: * Street Name: Town:

Recorded Land Property Search (Dates Available: 01/01/1973-Current)

Print the oldest deed listed on your results page. Often times you can find the deed or title information you’re looking for on a “notice” or “mortgage” document on the list, so start by viewing the oldest document shown. For sake of completeness, print and save all deeds listed here – someday these records will be historic too!

For records between the years of 1920 and 1973, follow the instructions below for “In Person” research. These records are not yet available online. ****Pro Tip:** do all of your research for the years 1973 back through 1874 in person on the Registry’s computers. Their system is faster and easier than what you can find online. However, Suffolk County Deeds for Charlestown between the years of 1874

and 1920 are also digitized online at www.Familysearch.com if you'd like to print from home vs. at the Registry. Scroll down to find instructions for a Family Search website search.

masslandrecords.com
Suffolk Recorded/Registered Land

Street #: * Street Name: Town:

Recorded Land Property Search (Dates Available: 01/01/1973-Current) Street #: Street Name: Monument Ave Town: Search All Towns From: 1/1/1973 To: 1/17/2017 (Total: 0.02 seconds, 11 rows)

Street Name	Rec. Date	Book/Page	Type Desc.	Street #	Town
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	7/21/2015	54799/93	LIEN		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	4/29/2011	47857/203	RELEASE		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	4/29/2011	47857/204	MUNICIPAL LIEN CERTIFICATE		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	4/29/2011	47857/205	DEED		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	4/29/2011	47857/207	MORTGAGE		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	4/29/2011	47857/228	MORTGAGE		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	4/29/2011	47857/233	DECLARATION OF HOMESTEAD		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	12/9/2009	45821/134	AFFIDAVIT		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	12/9/2009	45821/138	AFFIDAVIT		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	2/23/1996	20371/296	DEED		BOSTON
<input type="checkbox"/> MONUMENT AVE	10/4/1993	18546/176	DEED		BOSTON

Doc. #	Rec Date	Rec Time	Type Desc.	# of Pgs.	Book/Page	Consideration	Doc. Status
21	10/04/1993	9:33AM	DEED	1	18546/176	100.00	Verified/Certified

Street #	Street Name	Description
	MONUMENT AVE	CHARLESTOWN

Grantor/Grantee-3

FLYNN MARIE V	Grantor
FLYNN CLAIRE A	Grantor
FLYNN CLAIRE A	Grantee

In person: head into the Suffolk County Registry of Deeds located on the ground floor of the courthouse at 24 New Chardon St. (M-F, 8:30 – 4:45.) Follow the signs directing you towards “research computers.”

- Search for your property by address.
 - The results will be listed by date. Click on any that you'd like to view or print for your personal records, making sure to record every grantee / grantor and book and page number you come across, especially for a historic marker application. You may have a lot of these already if you started researching online. Bring cash or a check, the copies are \$0.50 each, it adds up quickly!
- When you get to a deed that has been recorded prior to 1974, using the same computer click on one of the tabs that says “book search.”
 - Enter the book number you are searching for.
 - Scroll to find the page you're looking for. Click on the page number, hit “display” and you can view the deed. Print this deed out – there may be multiple pages. Search for the previous deed referenced and so on and so forth until you get to

the oldest recorded deed in Suffolk County. ** Pro Tip: If your home was built in 1874 or later, you should find a deed that references either the land-only, or parcel of land. Once you've found this land or parcel-only deed you have finished your deed research! ** Pro Tip: If you get to a deed that does NOT reference a previous deed, note the names of the Grantee and Grantor as well as the date of transfer. You will then need to search the Deed Index books for the year of transfer and the last name of the Grantor. This will hopefully lead you to when that person bought the property, and you can pick up the deed trail again. If you hit another dead end with no previous deed reference, try looking for an atlas map from around the same time. The last name of the current owner will be listed on your property, you can use that last name to search the deed index books for your book and page number. Look for the resource list at the bottom of this document for Atlases and where to find them.

The oldest Suffolk County deed you can find will list a "LIB" and "FOL" number that you will need for the next step: researching Middlesex County Deeds.

Next stop: Once you have found a Suffolk County Deed that references a Middlesex County Deed, continue your research through the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, 208 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02141 **OR** go online to view all digitized deeds.

In person: It is a bit easier to go into the Registry of Deeds, their computerized search feature is quicker than what is online. Start in the basement where the old books are stored. There is a very helpful attendant that can help with questions. Start by giving them the book number (also known as LIB) you are looking for and they will help you find the records. Same process as in Suffolk County, make notes on your cheat sheet, each deed references the one before it. **Pro Tip: not all deeds are printable in the basement, the attendant will tell you where to go in order to get them pulled up and printed.

Online: start here: <https://familysearch.org>

- Click on "Search"
 - "Records"
 - Under "search by location" Click on "The United States" then Massachusetts.

Search Historical Records

Search for a deceased ancestor in historical records to uncover vital information from their life.

Deceased Ancestor's Name

First Names

Last Names

Search with a life event:

[Birth](#) | [Marriage](#) | [Residence](#) | [Death](#) | [Any](#)

Birthplace

Birth Year (Range)

Search with a relationship:

[Spouse](#) | [Parents](#) | [Other Person](#)

Restrict records by:

[Location](#) | [Type](#) | [Batch Number](#) | [Film Number](#)

Country

State or Province

Research By Location

Click an area of the world to start researching in a specific location.



Find a Collection

Researching within a specific collection? Find it here.

Collection Title



- Scroll all the way to the bottom of the page. Under “Probate and Court” click on “Massachusetts tax records 1620-1986”
- “View Images in this collection”
- Click on “Middlesex” county
- Each book is listed by the dates the deeds were recorded, then the book of deeds number you are searching for will be listed after “VOL”

FamilySearch
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Massachusetts Land Records, 1620-1986 Middlesex

Record Type, Year Range, and Volume number or letter

Chattel mortgages 1838-1853 Natick	Deeds 1827-1828 vol 278-280	Deeds 1879 vol 1513-1514
Deed index (grantee) 1639-1799 A-G	Deeds 1827 vol 272-274	Deeds 1879 vol 1515-1517
Deed index (grantee) 1639-1799 H-R	Deeds 1827 vol 275-277	Deeds 1879 vol 1518-1519
Deed index (grantee) 1639-1799 S-Z	Deeds 1828-1829 vol 284-285	Deeds 1879 vol 1520-1522
Deed index (grantee) 1800-1835 A-E	Deeds 1828 vol 281-283	Deeds 1879 vol 1523-1524
Deed index (grantee) 1800-1835 F-O	Deeds 1829-1830 vol 293	Deeds 1879 vol 1525-1527
Deed index (grantee) 1800-1835 P-Z	Deeds 1829-1830 vol 294-295	Deeds 1880-1881 vol 1556-1558
Deed index (grantee) 1836-1846 A-H	Deeds 1829-1831 vol 286	Deeds 1880 vol 1531-1533
Deed index (grantee) 1836-1846 I-Z	Deeds 1829 vol 287	Deeds 1880 vol 1534-1536
Deed index (grantee) 1847-1859 A-B	Deeds 1829 vol 288-289	Deeds 1880 vol 1537-1539
Deed index (grantee) 1847-1859 C-E	Deeds 1829 vol 290	Deeds 1880 vol 1540-1542
Deed index (grantee) 1847-1859 F-H	Deeds 1829 vol 291-292	Deeds 1880 vol 1543-1544
Deed index (grantee) 1847-1859 J-M	Deeds 1830-1831 vol 300-301	Deeds 1880 vol 1545-1547
Deed index (grantee) 1847-1859 N-S	Deeds 1830 vol 296	Deeds 1880 vol 1548-1550

- Click on the Book / Vol you need. Once you're in the book, on the upper left hand side you can enter an "image" number to search by page. Start by typing in the page number you are looking for. The book is indexed by image number, and some of the pages are blank so it won't be a direct connection to the page number you're looking for. You'll have to jump around a bit to get to the page you are looking for. If you cannot find the book / volume number you are looking for, you will have to head into the registry in person where it will be listed. Print and / or save each deed making note of each book and page number you find. Keep going! You should be able to trace your property back to when the land was a parcel with no building on it!

**Pro Tip: If you hit a dead end and a deed does not have a prior deed reference, then the property may have been inherited or gone through Probate. This will be a pretty complex research path from here on out. Gather as much information as you possibly can, including documentation from the additional sources below and contact us, we can help. Email info@CharlestownPreservation.org

Additional Supporting Documentation Sources. Now that you've found deeds for your property, and the names of the families that lived in it, you can search for more history on your property and its occupants. Here's a brief list:

Charlestown Atlases and Maps. Looking at maps in chronological order, a researcher can pinpoint the date a house first appears in a town survey. After 1866, Sanborn Maps (named for the firm that created them) give an excellent description of size, layout and materials for houses. They tell you, for example, if the building was wood frame or brick, how many stories it had, and where the windows were placed.

"Local History" cabinet at the Charlestown Branch Library.

- Maps: Tufts Map of 1818; 1833; 1852; 1839; 1848; 1851
- Sanborn, Bromley or Hopkins Atlases: 1875; 1885; 1892; 1901; 1911
- Images: Mallory Panoramic view from Bunker Hill Monument, 1848

Charlestown Neighborhood Atlases

1875 Hopkins & Co <http://www.historicmapworks.com/Atlas/US/6719/Suffolk+County+1875+Vol+6+Charlestown/>

1885 Leventhal Atlas, Online: http://www.leventhalmap.org/search/apachesolr_search/%22G1234.B6%20B7%201883%20v.6%22

1885 Bromley Atlas, Online: <http://www.wardmaps.com/viewasset.php?aid=27>

1892 Bromley, George Washington Atlas, online:

<http://www.historicmapworks.com/Atlas/US/6780/Boston+1892+Vol+10+Charlestown/>

1912 Bromley and Co Atlas, online: <http://www.wardmaps.com/viewasset.php?aid=930>

1922 Bromley and Co Atlas, online: <http://www.wardmaps.com/viewasset.php?aid=952>

Boston Atlases and Maps with Charlestown Shown

- www.wardmaps.com
- Boston Public Library, Copley. The Leventhal Map Collection has an extraordinary collection. Most of the maps are available online at www.leventhalmap.org and include the 1852 Henry McIntyre Map of Boston including Charlestown which has the earliest marking of most extant buildings. <http://www.leventhalmap.org/id/10180>
- The 1868 and revised 1871 Hopkins Insurance Atlas is the earliest and most essential record of Charlestown buildings with owner names.

Town Directories: private publications that list residents, addresses and occupations, but not necessarily building owners. Women (unless they're widows) don't show a lot. Usually these are street listings. Early directories sometimes omit house numbers, but residents are listed in order along a block.

- Charlestown Directories from 1834 to 1874 are in the Charlestown Library's Local History Cabinet. Directories from 1875 on are at the Copley Square library.
- 1845 – 1875 City Directories can be searched by street address or name of occupant here: http://boston1872.docema.com/cgi-bin/directory_search.pl

Census Records. Federal and State censuses by decade started in the 1800's. For Charlestown, census takers only began recording street names and addresses beginning in 1870. Prior to that it was dwelling numbers, and won't be much help. Census records can be searched by the family name at www.familysearch.org or www.ancestry.com . These records will show the occupants at the property at the time of the census as well as ages and relationships.

The city of Boston began collecting building plans and issuing building permits around 1873-4 after the great fires. Building permits contain vast amounts of information, but very few plans exist. You can request the "jacket" for your property to see improvements and additions made to the property. Go to ISD at 1010 Massachusetts Avenue after 1pm when the contractors thin out. \$5 Parking lot across the street.

Tax Records. The City Archives in West Roxbury can be contacted for an appointment to consult the very complicated early tax records. Bring all of your research, especially the deeds in order to provide names and years. If the assessment on a property goes up in a given year over year it is a good indication that a house was either built or substantially improved at that time.

Charlestown Newspapers: The Bunker Hill Aurora, Bunker Hill Times, Charlestown Chronicle, Enterprise, News and Tribune were all papers of varying duration. The Boston Public Library (Copley Square) and State House Library have most of them. They are not very helpful for dating property, but can sometimes help with events at the property, like fires... or accidents. Look for mentions of names of previous owners, your street name and address. If you're lucky you may even find old photos

Middlesex Registry Plan books. A few plotting street and lot development plan books are available, usually from the first half of the 19th Century.

Wills, Probate and Inventories: If people die intestate (without a will) deed records stop. Property is often mentioned and divided among the heirs. You will need to look up inheritors in the Registry indices to find the trail again. Will and Probate records are available at the deed registries.

Information is not limited to the web or your local library. Ask neighbors who have been in the neighborhood longer than you have. With perseverance and some investigative work, you can find information on your home's history. There are volumes of information out there just waiting to be found!