

Portsmouth Historic House Plaque Program Research Help Sheet

Welcome to the exciting world of house history research!

Figuring out the approximate year your house was built (and maybe even the person who built it!) requires combining information from several places to create a full and accurate picture. It's detective work!

NOTE: *We encourage all beginner researchers to visit the [Portsmouth Athenaeum](#) first. Open Tuesday-Saturday 1-4 PM or by appointment with Talia 603-545-7602. Many of the resources you will need to consult are here, and the knowledgeable staff can assist you with your research.*

Your plaque application must use *at least three* of the following ways to document your house's history:

1. **Deeds.** Trace your house's ownership back to its original owner. This can be hard for houses built in the 1700s and early 1800s. Include the names of each buyer and seller, the dates of each sale, and the deed book number and page number for each sale.

How to Do It:

- a. Start by going to [MapGeo for the City of Portsmouth](#). Click on "Go to MapGeo," then type your address into the search box in the upper right corner. This will give you your property's Map-Lot number and the deed book and page number for the most recent deed. This information will help with the next step.
- b. Go next to [NH Deeds for Rockingham County](#), click on "Search County Records," accept the Disclaimer Agreement at the bottom of the page, then click **AVA** to search. Read the instructions carefully! Reach out to our team portsplaques@gmail.com if you need assistance navigating.
- c. You can also go to the [Rockingham County Registry of Deeds](#) at 10 Route 125 in Brentwood for personal assistance, or call them at (603) 642-5526.

2. **Maps.** Find the first appearance of your property on a historic map of Portsmouth.

How to Do it:

- a. City maps published in 1813 and 1850 show building footprints, and an 1876 map identifies property owners. You can view these maps at the Portsmouth Athenaeum, or online at:
 - i. [1813 Map of Portsmouth](#), Library of Congress
 - ii. [1850 Map of Portsmouth](#), Maine Historical Society

- iii. [1876 Map of Portsmouth](#), Digital Commonwealth
 - b. Fire insurance maps show detailed information about the homes and businesses in the compact part of the city. Maps for Portsmouth were published in 1887, 1892, 1898, 1904, 1910, 1920, and 1949. You can view these maps at the Portsmouth Athenaeum, or online at the [Library of Congress](#).
3. **A narrative history of your house.** This could include people and events associated with your home, and information on the building's design, style, setting, materials or workmanship. Include all sources consulted.
4. **Ownership.** Trace the history of your house's owners.

How to Do It:

- a. Trace the names of your house's previous owners through deeds, as shown above.
 - b. Consult Portsmouth City Directories. These were published roughly every two years beginning in 1823. You can find them at the Portsmouth Athenaeum and at the Portsmouth Public Library [Special Collections Room](#).
5. **Portsmouth Advocates' 1982 Historic District Survey.** Find your house in this comprehensive survey of Portsmouth's historic buildings. Basic information found here can point you toward further research to complete your project.

How to Do It:

- a. Consult the Portsmouth Historic District Survey at the Portsmouth Athenaeum.
- b. View the [Portsmouth Historic District Survey](#) online.

Questions? Need advice? Contact the Portsmouth Historic Plaques Program!
<https://portsmouthhistory.org/advocates/plaque-program>