

Researching Your Historic Swampscott Home

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Credit: Lithograph, FM Knowles, "Swampscott Beach," c. 1875 (BPL Arts)

Getting Started:

Step 1: Access your home's Town Assessor's Record:

- Go to: <http://swampscott.patriotproperties.com/default.asp>
- Pull up your house (by owner or street number) and review the basic info there.
- Then open the "Assessor's Record Card" to take a more detailed look at permits pulled going back to the late 1980s. This can give you an idea of more recent changes to your house.

Step 2: Search for a Massachusetts Historical Commission Inventory Form

- Go to: <https://mhc-macris.net/>
- Select "Swampscott" and at least your street name
- You can also browse the town more broadly. There are four broad areas catalogued: Beach Bluff, Phillips Beach, Swampscott (broadly), and The Points

Phase 1: Tracking Down The Deeds

Step 1: Find your current deed

- Go to the Salem Registry of Deeds: <http://salemdeeds.com/salemdeeds/> (everything is online)
 - Full searchable electronic records go back to 1951. From 1640 to 1950, the records are available online but you'll need to do a book and page or index search

- Using the book and page number from your Assessor's Record or by searching for your last name or street, pull up your current deed.
- You can also find mortgage and lien information by searching for your name or house number

Step 2: Go back in time

- Learn how to read your deed (grantor, grantee, mortgagor, mortgagee, etc)
- Search backward with book and page numbers (each previous sale is listed on the current deed)
- As you go beyond 1951, you'll need to use either book and page numbers or an index search.
- Notes:
 - More than one deed may be on a page, and a deed might cover more than 1 page itself, so flip back and forth to make sure you've got the whole thing.
 - If the book and page numbers don't seem to be matching up, try an index search for the last name and look up the book/page numbers until you find your deed.
 - Be aware of the difference between mortgages and deeds. You'll find both (including mortgage lien releases).
 - Also, I hope you can read old cursive!

Step 3: Create a deed trail

- Download all of the deeds you've found as pdfs and create a deed trail in a file on your computer.
- Doing so will give you a running history of the purchase and sale of your house. Try to go back in time to the first deed or the sale of land. You will likely note this first sale by language that says that a field or land was sold, with no mention of a dwelling or buildings (or *messuage* in some of the older deeds).

Note: You may also be able to find **engineering plans** for your lot, street, or neighborhood. These have **different book/page numbers** and can be searched under the "Plans/Engineering" section. You may find references to these plans in deeds you examine, especially if the lot was split or combined at some point.

Phase 2: Visualizing the Area with Historic Maps

Step 1: Use the Resources at SalemDeeds

- Go to Salem Deeds > Plans/Engineering > Atlases > Swampscott
- Swampscott is recorded in the Lynn Atlases of 1897, 1905, and 1924
- If you go to Atlases > Lynn, you can also find the Essex County Atlases of 1872 and 1880
- Find the appropriate page in the Atlas
- Use the Atlases to build a visual/map history of your house/neighborhood. You'll be able to see the rough shape of your house as well as the listed owner!

Step 2: Use the Resources in the Baldwin Room at the SPL

- Though there are various resources in the Baldwin Room, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps in particular help supplement the Atlases. These maps show building shape, height, and primary material. The Baldwin Room has the Sanborn maps for 1907 and 1928, among others.
 - You can also find the Sanborn Maps through the Library of Congress website: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/?q=swampscott> (1907, 1913, 1920)

Phase 3: Flesh Out The Story

Make use of the various resources available to help pull in extra information. Here are a few:

- SPL and the Baldwin Room (the historical reference room, full of the town annual reports, old maps, etc).
 - Many resources are online at: <https://archive.org/details/swampscottpubliclibrary> (including town annual reports)
- MHC Surveys: <https://mhc-macris.net/>
- Swampscott Directories (1856, 1895)
- Lynn Directory (1841)
- Census Records (every 10 years, for this you'll want Ancestry.com or something similar)
- MA Vital Statistics (1841-1910 online): <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/vitalrecordssearch/vitalrecordssearch.aspx>
- Probate Records: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/get-access-to-historic-probate-records>
 - New England Historic Genealogical Society - <https://www.americanancestors.org/index.aspx>
 - Historic probate books and file papers: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/>
- NOBLE Net Archive: <https://digitalheritage.noblenet.org/swampscott> (great for photos!)
- Old Newspapers: Ancestry.com, New England Historical Genealogical Society (AmericanAncestors.org), Boston Public Library, American Antiquarian Society, etc.
- And, of course, Google and Google Scholar

You may also find local historical books and references useful for broader information:

- Alonzo Lewis, *History of Lynn* (1829)
- Waldo Thompson, *Swampscott: Historical Sketches of the Town* (1885)
- *Swampscott, Massachusetts: Celebrating 150 Years, 1852-2002* (published by the SHC)
- Anderson, Dorothy M. *The Era of the Summer Estates, Swampscott, Massachusetts 1870 / 1940*. Canaan, New Hampshire: Phoenix Publishing, 1985
- Cutter, William Richard. *Genealogical and Personal Memoirs Relating to the Families of Boston and Eastern Massachusetts*, Vol. 3. Boston: Clearfield Co, 1908.

- Fox, Pamela W. *North Shore Boston, Houses of Essex County 1865-1930*. New York: Acanthus Press, 2005.
- Garland, Joseph E. *Boston's Gold Coast: The North Shore, 1890-1929*. Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co, 1981. (He's also good for other local history books)
- Pierce, Alan S. *A History of Boston's Jewish North Shore*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009.
- Turino, Kenneth C. and Christopher R. Mathias. *Swampscott* (Images of America series). Dover, NH: Arcadia, 1996.
- Woodcock, Sue Ellen. *Swampscott* (Then and Now series). Charleston, SC: Arcadia: 2002.

Phase 4: Writing a Descriptive Narrative

Use everything you've learned to write up a descriptive history (a story) of your house!

- Example 1: 3 Boynton Street, "The Mrs. M Home," by Nancy Lusignan Schultz, PhD
 - <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/65082940/01907-winter-2020-v3>
(pages 14-16, 31)
- Example 2: 27 Hemenway Rd

Phase 5: Submitting an inventory form to the MHC (if desired)

- Example: 27 Hemenway Rd submission form

Preservation Awards: You can also submit your own house for a Preservation Award if you think it fits the criteria!

SHC Research Option: If this all seems like too much but you'd like a report on your house, the SHC offers a couple of options where we will do the research for you and, if you wish, provide you with a historic plaque to place on your house! Please get in touch to discuss options and rates.