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# House Histories *of Aurora*

## Preliminary Questions to Consider

1. When was the house built?
2. Was this the first building on the site?
3. Who lived here first? Did they build the house?
4. Who else has lived here through the years?
5. What did the house look like when it was built?
  - a. Style of architecture
  - b. What color/colors was it?
  - c. What changes have been made through the years?
  - d. Are there any old photographs of the house?
6. What were the neighborhood and the city like when the house was built?
  - a. How many houses were on the block already?
  - b. Were there shops or businesses in the area?
  - c. What kinds of jobs did the original owners have?
  - d. Were they part of an ethnic group?
  - e. What schools and churches were nearby?

## Where Should I Start?

1. Look for the original property abstract. Unfortunately, many have been lost through the years.
2. Ask former owners of the property and their children.
3. Try your neighbors and friends of former owners.
4. Local church records may have information.

These are a handful of ways to find out about changes to the original structure and to locate old photographs of your home.

Also, check for physical evidence to suggest a period of construction. Things like foundation materials, woodwork styles, types of wood used in the construction, nails, latches, hinges, and fireplaces can provide some excellent clues.



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## How Can the Library Help?

### City Directories

Our collection of City Directories begins with 1858-1859, and continues to the present. While some gaps do exist, our holdings appear to be a complete run of all city directories that were published. These books provide an alphabetical list of the people living within the city limits and sometimes additional information such as names of spouses and the occupations of the residents. Beginning in 1895/1896, the directories included a section in the back which lists the streets in the city of Aurora, all the house or business numbers on the street at the time, and the resident or business on the premises. This feature continues to the present.

### Census Records

The Emma and Robert Wegman Local History Room has U. S. census records for Kane County from 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910 on microfilm. The 1840-1860 censuses are indexed by the head of household's name. There are also Illinois State census records from 1855 and 1865.

*\*Be advised: Census records can be difficult to use. Handwriting styles have changed through the years, and the entries can be difficult to read.*

*Additionally, census information was often given verbally to a recorder who wrote what was heard. This means that names, places, and other information can be misspelled. Needless to say, these factors increase the chances for factual errors.*



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## How Can the Library Help?

### Obituaries

The Emma and Robert Wegman Local History Room has microfilm for the *Aurora Beacon News* starting in 1848, as well as scattered runs of other Aurora newspapers through the years. Contained therein are obituaries, which are brief articles about local deaths. These articles can provide information about the people who have lived in your home in the past or give an indication of some of the events that may have taken place there.

*\*Be advised: Should you not find citations to a person of interest, there are ways to uncover death dates, but sometimes it can be a bit of a chore. Also, it was not always guaranteed that a death would be written up in the newspaper.*

### Genealogy/Local History Digital Resources

The APL Genealogy & Local History webpage contains a Digital Resources section with several searchable indexes. In particular, the "Aurora Genealogy Index" may have information about some of the past residents of your home.

Additionally, the "Beacon Obituary Index" includes more than 113,000 entries on local deaths from the original newspapers, or other citations to articles that provide details of passing. While not complete, this source may provide dates to find the death notices of a particular person.

The Santori Public Library's historical collection may have additional information about some of the more prominent former residents of your home. We have several city and county histories which include varying degrees of biographical information.



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## Other Sources for House History Information

### City of Aurora Historical Preservation Commission

Their collections include the Sanborn Maps and building permits. The Sanborn Maps were compiled by the Sanborn Company for fire insurance purposes. The local Historical Preservation Commission has these maps from 1885-1907, and they can help to determine the size and shape of a building through time. Some of the maps are color-coded to give an indication of the building materials. Local building permits date back to 1913 and help to track changes made to the original structure over time.

### City of Aurora Water and Sewer Department

649 S. River St.  
Aurora, IL. 60506  
(630) 256-3710

The department's records indicate when a house was connected to the city water lines. Their records may tell what materials were used to make the connection and often provide the name of the plumber who did the original tap.

### Kane County Recorder of Deeds

Kane County Government Center  
719 S. Batavia Avenue #C  
Geneva, IL. 60134  
(630) 232-5935

[www.kanecountyrecorder.net](http://www.kanecountyrecorder.net)

The Recorder of Deeds has information pertaining to deeds or mortgage transactions. Their website features an interactive search function to locate house records.



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## Other Sources for House History Information

### Kane County Clerk

Kane County Government Center, Building B  
719 S. Batavia Ave.  
Geneva, IL. 60134  
(630) 232-5964  
[www.co.kane.il.us/coc/](http://www.co.kane.il.us/coc/)

The Tax Extension Department has all of the Kane County tax records from 1881 to the present. If you see a large increase from one year to the next, most likely some building project took place on your property that year.

### Aurora Township Assessor's Office

80 N. Broadway Aurora, IL. 60505  
(630) 896-7792  
[www.auroratownship.org/assessors-office.html](http://www.auroratownship.org/assessors-office.html)

The Township Assessor has records that indicate whether the property was improved or not. The offices holdings date from 1899.

### The Aurora Historical Society

P. O. Box 905 Aurora, IL. 60507  
(630) 897-9029 (by appointment)  
[www.aurorahistory.org](http://www.aurorahistory.org)

The Historical Society also has several of the City Directories, aerial views of the city, old county atlases, Sanborn Maps, and some house files.



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## Now That I Have All This Information, What's Next?

**Keep written records** of what you've been able to uncover and include all the sources. You may also include hearsay, and assumptions, but jot them down as such.

**Make several copies** of the completed information, and put them in different places. Keep one copy with your deed or mortgage papers, and leave instructions to pass it on to future owners of the property. Keep additional copies in a safe place and give copies to your next of kin.

**Consider donating a copy** of the information to the Aurora Historical Society, to the Santori Public Library, or to the Aurora Preservation Commission. If you have been able to determine an exact date for the construction of your house, inscribe the year on a metal plaque, and attach to the foundation, or to a main beam.

### One last thing

Should you have a property abstract, or a copy of one, please consider donating a facsimile to the Historical or Preservation Commission. These documents are becoming increasingly rare, and are important sources of information about the city's history.

## Questions? Contact Us!

Santori Library  
101 S. River St.  
Aurora, IL 60506  
630-264-4122

[genealogyhelp@aurorapubliclibrary.org](mailto:genealogyhelp@aurorapubliclibrary.org)