

ADAMS COUNTY PROPERTY RESEARCH

Compiled by ACHS Staff

The Adams County Historical Society contains many resources germane to property and house research. **In order to begin any investigation of a property and/or home a researcher must first know the current owner of the property in question and then work backwards. If the current owner is not known, a researcher must visit the Adams County Courthouse in Gettysburg. The map room at the courthouse contains all current property owners of each track of land within the county. The map room also has the current deed on file. After identifying the current owner of the subject property and the current deed, a researcher may then visit the deed room in the courthouse. The courthouse has an electronic index of deeds back to 1937. Search all deeds related to the subject property at least back to 1920 (Deed Book 102 or earlier).** In many cases a single deed will give many references regarding the transfer of a property to different owners. It is suggested to copy all relevant deed references. Researchers should assemble the recital for the property which is a detailed account of the ownership of the property.

A researcher armed with the above information may now visit the Adams County Historical Society. The following steps illustrate a sound approach to researching a home or property.

1) Check the microfilm deed index for grantors (*sellers*) or grantees (*buyers*) from 1800-1937 on microfilm and/or the grantor or grantee deed index volume which runs from 1800-1893. The Society holds the first deed book through Deed Book 102.

2) Check the Society's unrecorded deed collection which is indexed by grantor or grantee. In times past a property owners was not required to record the transfer of a property in the courthouse. The Society has a large collection of donated original deeds and copies which were never recorded. In addition the Society has a list of unrecorded deeds in the courthouse collection for Adams County.

3) Wills and/or estate papers often list what happens to a property when someone dies. Researchers should check the wills and/or estate papers associated with the owners of the parcel in question.

4) Search the Society's collection of tax lists. The Society contains copies of York County tax records from 1762-1799, and all the original tax volumes for Adams County from 1800-1960. The tax volumes are arranged by year and organized by township or borough. Names appear alphabetically by surname. Single men are usually located in the back of a volume. In some cases tax records reveal increased assessments for a new or improved home and/or barn to a property which assists researchers in identifying the age of a structure. Tax lists do not list addresses or show where a person lived they only show a person was taxed in a particular township or borough. For early properties the Direct Tax of 1798 lists buildings and material types.

5) Properties offered at public sale are usually completely described in the newspaper. Check the Society's surname catalog for an owner's name to see if an ad appeared in the paper. The Society also subscribes to a newspaper service (www.newspaperarchive.com) which digitizes old newspapers on microfilm and makes them available to search by keyword. Check this source for an owner's or renter's name. Researchers should be mindful of surname spellings and search under all possible surname variations.

6) Check the Society's map collection. The Society has many maps depending on era and county location to assist in property research. In particular the 1858 Adams County Wall Map and the 1872 Adams County Atlas are most helpful. Both of these sources give residents of properties at the time of drafting and also show structures on the property. The 1872 map contains the lot numbers for boroughs

which are indispensable in researching the property. It should be remembered modern addresses for properties within a borough are not created until about 1900. In rural areas, modern addresses in Adams County were not adopted until the 1990s. Some of these properties still used Rural Deliver (RD) numbers well into the late twentieth century.

7) The Society contains a collection of fire insurance maps for some boroughs in Adams County produced by the D. A. Sanborn Company on microfilm and in digital format. These maps were created for towns and cities only and show construction of buildings with ongoing changes. The maps **do not** contain structures in rural areas.

8) The Society contains all the original plaque applications for Civil War Buildings sponsored and created by the Gettysburg Civil War Roundtable in 1966. If the building in question has a Civil War plaque a researcher should consult this source. It should be noted this material is not verified but in some cases the information contained in these applications about the property is nowhere else.

9) For properties in Gettysburg, the Society has research compiled by its staff and volunteers. The material is organized by town lot number. These Gettysburg town lot files are part of the Society's vertical file collection. To locate the town lot number needed for research see the 1872 Adams County Atlas or the staff.

10) For properties in Gettysburg, the Society holds historic survey forms compiled in the 1980s. These HBSC forms are part of the Society's vertical file collection and are organized by street name. In many cases structures fortunate enough to have these forms have been thoroughly researched with deed records and other citations noted.

11) If the property in question was anything other than a private residence such as a hotel, mill, tavern, school, church, public building, or other such establishment the Society contains vertical files by name which may have additional information. Researchers should consult the Society's Vertical File Index

12) Researchers should check the Society's collections for references to warrants, surveys, and patent deeds. These sources offer early history to a particular tract of land. In some cases there is useful data in compiled research related to the Manor of the Maske (43,500 Square Acres), Possum Creek Mannor (988 Square Acres), Carroll's Delight (5,007 Square Acres), Carrollsburg (2,850 Square Acres), and Digges' Choice (10,501 Square Acres). Current survey research on 20 of Adams County's 21 townships has been completed by the Rev. Dr. Neal O. Hively. The published three volumes, and four corresponding maps, by Dr. Hively cover early land holders and their surveyed properties. All townships in the county are now completed. These volumes and maps are available for sale on the Society's website. **The Society will not copy individual pages of these volumes, nor will it copy sections of the maps.** Researchers may either visit ACHS to consult these sources or buy them from the gift shop. Cumberland Township land research was published in 1992 as the Manor of the Maske Study.

13) Researchers should check a variety of secondary sources including the index to the Society's annual journal entitled *Adams County History* and the two current published county histories. Any name associated with the property should be checked.

14) When possible a visual inspection of any standing structure is also essential to identifying the age of a building. Check for date stones or other mentions of construction physically present on any building. Researchers can also consult various published and web sources related to building techniques, construction materials, and architecture by time period to help narrow down the original construction date and additions and/or improvements to a building.

15) If the owner, renter, or family member of any person associated with the property in question can be interviewed the researcher should by all means do so. In some cases persons familiar with the property can provide valuable insight into the history of the land and/or buildings. This could include construction, additions, and/or repairs to structures.