Subject Guide: Researching Your House's History

This is a brief guide to researching property in Santa Cruz County. Property research can vary from finding the year the house was built, to constructing a complete chain of title for a property, complete with biographical information about the owners. Before beginning your research, it is a good idea to outline your research objectives.

Building A Chain of Title

The chain of title is the list of owners of a property. To build the chain of title, you would start with the current owner. From who did the current owner buy the property and when? Be sure to make copies of the deed and records you use to build your chain of title.

Chain of Title Research at the County Building

The Santa Cruz County Government Building is located at 701 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060

The Assessor's Office can provide the APN and a limited parcel history. Building records (with a signed release form from the owner) can be viewed here.

The Recorder's Office provides the deeds and records you will need to build your chain of title.

Books to Help You Research Your House's History

Books:

- City of Capitola Architectural Survey
  by Rowe & Associates,
  R 720.979471 ROW 1986
  Presents about 240 structures in Capitola that best represent traditional architectural styles or the community's vernacular architecture. Also available as a PDF on the City of Capitola Planning Department website http://www.cityofcapitola.org/communitydevelopment/page/current-planning
- Every Structure Tells a Story: How to Research the History of a Property in Santa Cruz County
  by Santa Cruz County Historical Trust ,
  OVERSIZE 979.471 Ev2
  This is the ultimate resource for researching a property's history in Santa Cruz County. The book offers advice, checklists, sources, and examples of research.
- F.A. Hihn Company: Agreements, Deeds, Leases
  by Fosgate, Jennifer
  RR 979.471 FOS
  This 12 volume set gives the text of the original Hihn Deeds. It is also searchable on UCSC's Hihn-Younger Archive at http://library.ucsc.edu/speccoll/hihn/hihn-younger-documents.
- Historic Homes of Boulder Creek
  by Kennedy, Barbara
  CALIFORNIANA 720.9794 KEN
  This book documents the lives of some of the early leaders of Boulder Creek and the houses they built.
- If Walls Could Talk: The county's heritage presented through intriguing stories of our old and famous homes and the men who built them
  by County Bank of Santa Cruz,
  CALIFORNIANA 979.471 COU

Twelve Santa Cruz residents and their residences are profiled, including Castro, Cowell, Jeter, Porter, Sesnon, and Wilder.

- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps
  by Sanborn Map Company,
  R MF 912.79471 SAN
  These maps are in bound books and on microfilm at the Downtown Branch. They show the "footprint" of the building. Buildings were color-coded as to construction type and materials, and labeled to indicate the number of stories and the use of the building. Updates were pasted in the volumes and the date of the updates are indicated in the front of each volume. These maps can be helpful in determining an approximate construction date of a building and how the building has changed over the years.

- Santa Cruz Historic Building Survey, Volume I
  by Charles Hall Page & Associates,
  R 720.97947 C38 1976
  This survey covers structures of architectural significance within the City of Santa Cruz. There are 329 buildings with pictures and an evaluation of their architectural merit. Available as a PDF at http://www.cityofsantacruz.com/departments/planning-and-community-development/programs/historic-preservatio

- Santa Cruz Historic Building Survey, Volume II
  by City of Santa Cruz, Department of Planning
  R 720.97947 SAN 1989
  This is a continuation of the 1976 survey. It catalogs an additional 330 structures. Available as a PDF at http://www.cityofsantacruz.com/departments/planning-and-community-development/programs/historic-preservatio

- Santa Cruz Historic Building Survey, Volume III
  by City of Santa Cruz, Department of Planning
  R 720.97947 SAN VOL. 3 2013
  The third volume of the historic building survey looks at additional properties not previously surveyed, particularly those associated with mid twentieth century architecture, older resources that had been missed in the earlier surveys, and man-made features in the environment such as walls, stairs, hitching posts, and ponds. Available as a PDF at http://www.cityofsantacruz.com/departments/planning-and-community-development/programs/historic-preservatio

- The Sidewalk Companion to Santa Cruz Architecture
  by Chase, John Leighton
  917.9471 CHA
  This guide is limited to structures within the City of Santa Cruz and gives a brief history of the neighborhoods it covers. There are 496 buildings included.

- The Walk Around Santa Cruz Book: A Look at the City's Architectural Treasures
  by Koch, Margaret
  CALIFORNIANA 720.97947 KOC
  This small book includes some buildings in the county but focuses mainly on Mission Hill, Downtown Residential, Ocean View Ave., and Beach Hill.

- Victorian Houses of Watsonville
  by Pajaro Valley Historical Association,
  R 720.9794 P16 1974

Periodicals to Help Your Research Your House's History

In addition to the periodicals blow, the Santa Cruz Public Library has created the Newspaper Clipping File, available here on the library website. This database contains more than 50,000 articles of local interest. They are indexed and are kept at the Downtown Branch for viewing. Particular files of interest may include the Historic Houses file.

Books:

- Haines Criss Cross Directory
  by Haines & Co.,

  These directories are arranged by address and phone number. Santa Cruz Public Library has some years between 1977 and 2015.

- Mountain Echo
  by Mountain Echo,

  This newspaper was published in Boulder Creek and is indexed from October 24, 1896 to December 23, 1916. It is available on microfilm at the Downtown and Boulder Creek branches.

- Polk's Santa Cruz Directory
  by Polk & Co., R.L.

  These directories are arranged by address and phone number. Santa Cruz Public Library has most years between 1910 and 1988.

- Santa Cruz Sentinel
  by Sentinel Pub. Co.,

  The Sentinel is indexed from 1856 to 1956. It is available on microfilm at the Downtown Branch.

Websites to Help You Research Your House's History

Related Websites:

- Historic Maps: Digitized and Online (http://guides.library.ucsc.edu/maps/historic)
  The UCSC University Library has digitized historic maps, including Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, for the Santa Cruz area showing the boundaries of land ownership, including the names of landowners and uses of the land as well as information about streets, buildings, and physical features such as creeks.

- Santa Cruz County History - Architecture (http://www.santacruzpl.org/history/topics/1/)
  This local history page has information about bridges, buildings, landmarks, and wharves in Santa Cruz County. Of particular interest to those researching architecture in Santa Cruz will be the articles, "Santa Cruz's Architectural Heritage," which includes a sketchbook of architectural styles in Santa Cruz.

- Santa Cruz Sentinel Archives (http://www.newspapers.com/welcome/#silo=33)
  Digital collections of Evening Sentinel, Santa Cruz Evening News, Santa Cruz Weekly Sentinel and Santa Cruz Sentinel provided by a partnership between California Digital Newspaper Collection and Newspapers.com. Archive covers 1896 to 2005. Access is ONLY available from inside a library branch.