

Researching Your House (and more!)



Where to Begin

1. Tax Assessor's Website – Parcel ID Number & Sales History

Begin your research at the DeKalb County Tax Assessor's office or website. Online information includes sales and parcel ID numbers. You can also go to the office with your address and get help in person.

<https://www.dekalbcountyga.gov/taxation/property-tax>

Move your mouse over the *property tax* link on the left side of the page and click on *view and pay property tax online* to enter your street address. You can get owner information, building statistics, tax and sales histories, some deed book information and the parcel ID for your property. You can print out a map of your property with the lot dimensions.

A parcel ID is made up of several numbers and knowing what they represent may be helpful to you. For example, parcel ID number 12 123 12 123 provides much information.

- The **first** number, 12 in this case, is the land district.
- The **second** number is the land lot. In the 1821 Georgia Land lottery, which covered this area, land lots were surveyed and distributed in lots of about 200 acres.
- The **third** number of your Parcel ID is the block number. Blocks are designated by the Tax Assessor's office and in theory, are a continuous area of land not interrupted by a street. They were created starting with number one and just go from there.
- The **fourth** number of your ID is your lot number.

The tax assessor's information includes a sales history which may have sales dates, deed types and sometimes even the sale prices. You will also find the Deed Book/Page Number for each sale. Online information goes back to the 1970s. Prior to that, you can use Deed Books *located at the "new" DeKalb County Courthouse, DeKalb County Courthouse, 556 N. McDonough Street, Decatur GA 30030*

In some cases a plat number will be recorded. On the Tax Assessor's website, there is a tab to click on for "Property Tax Data" at the bottom of the "Property Overview" screen. On the left under Deed Information, you will see *Plat Book/Page*. If your address has this information, you might find a plat at the DeKalb County Courthouse on McDonough Street.

2. Tax Assessor's Office – Tax Assessor's Card

You can get a copy of your tax assessor's card at this office by providing the clerk your street address; *they will make a **copy** of both sides of the card for you.* The front side of the card has stamps used each time taxes were paid on the property and who paid. This is a great resource for names of previous owners. The back side of the card has square footage of the house and a drawing of the footprint that may include additions made to the house. Other information it could include: construction date, building materials, number of bathrooms and more. *Every bit of the information on this card is useful!*

You can continue your research at the DeKalb County Courthouse "Real Estate Record Room."
<http://www.dksuperiorclerk.com/>

3. Deed Books and Plat Maps – A brief explanation

You will find indexes to the deed books, which are divided by Grantee (buyer) and Grantor (seller). Any single sale of a house will have listings in both indexes. The Grantor Indexes are black and the Grantee Indexes are red. The indexes prior to 1947 are located under a counter towards the rear of the room. The indexes from 1947 to 2000 are located on top of the counter. Indexes from 2000 to the present are computerized and accessible in this room. And the deed books are located throughout the room. Once you have the basic layout, everything should be in chronological order. The first index includes deeds from 1822 to 1910, however, deed books A – K are missing due to the courthouse fire and the first deed book available is Volume L which begins in 1846. Copies are available for a fee.

Use the lot, block, book and page numbers associated with deeds to make sure you are on the right track. In the history of your house these sets of names can be very helpful. **Start with the most recent sale and work your way backwards through the deeds.** For instance, if you begin with the current owner of a house in the Grantee Index, you can continue through that index by always looking up who bought the property. You do not need to look at every deed, but the earliest ones might have interesting information.

Plat books can be found under a counter in the rear of the Real Estate Records room. Plat maps show divisions between properties but usually do not show the footprint of the house. You may find that your house is in a subdivision that has a recorded plat number associated with it, and you may be able to trace back the acquisition and plans of the original developer. **The DeKalb History Center (DHC)** has records on some subdivisions/communities, which *could* be a further source of information.

DHC has many collections, but remember that you must seek assistance in navigating around them, so **please** make an appointment! You can either call the Archivist at DHC at 404-373-1088, extension 28, or email blomqvist@dekalbhistory.org to make an appointment. Our Archives are located in the historic DeKalb County Courthouse in downtown Decatur at 101 E. Court Square, Decatur GA 30030. The Archives hours are Tuesday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. by appointment.

Please be aware that all of the questions you have about your house may not be answered. Finding your home's architect can be a difficult task and may not be possible. Many houses built since the 20th century were catalog houses such as the kit homes sold by Sears or other companies like Aladdin, Sterling and Radford. Or your house may come from the many plan books which were available to builders.

4. City Directories at DHC

You can search for names you have gotten from sale records, deeds and tax information in the City Directories held by the DHC. With just one name, you can find addresses, spouses and sometimes even what a person did for a living. You can also look up a street address and find names of people living there.

DHC has city directories from 1887 to 1990 (with some gaps in the collection); they were usually published every year. DeKalb County had its own directory in 1939. It was only done for that one year, but it has areas not covered in the Atlanta directory. We also have Suburban Directories beginning in 1956 which cover parts of DeKalb. The areas covered may vary by year.

The Atlanta Public Library also has copies of city directories and the Decatur Library has them on microfilm. Keep in mind that you may not find your house listed; it must have been within city limits at that time, to be included. Note: Atlanta and the metro area renumbered houses in 1892 and 1926.

5. Map Collection at DHC

The DHC has a wonderful map collection where you may be able to find maps of your area before it was developed or even maps made during the Civil War. While it is unlikely you will find a map with your individual house, the DHC Special Collections may have information on your neighborhood or community.

There is a map inventory that the archivist will use to help you navigate our collection. We have various plat and subdivision maps from different time periods, and two topographic map collections from 1928 which show the locations of some houses in DeKalb County. We also have Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps and the 1915 Maynard Carter Simmons Map book which shows property owners. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps are also available now online.

<https://research.library.gsu.edu/c.php?g=115461&p=755495>

6. Special Collections at DHC

Using the first two numbers of your parcel ID from the Tax Assessor's office, you can check for resources in the title abstracts in the archives. Law offices in the area donated many files collected while doing legal work for clients; perhaps someone conducted a title exam on your property. All of the paperwork was done by the legal staff and these files are wonderful sources of information. Most of these papers are from the 1910s and 1920s. If you have an older house, you may find quite a bit amongst these donations. (Note: The Atlanta History Center also has title abstracts from various companies.) Names collected in your research may yield even more information. Again, it is hit or miss, as records from an office handling your area may simply not be a part of the DHC collection....yet. We have other great resources, including:

- **Biographical Vertical files** – The amount of information in these files is variable
- **Maps** – A large variety of DeKalb County maps are available, including Sanborn maps
- **Oral History** – DVDs of interviews with DeKalb residents and others, beginning in 1985
- **Photographs** – Including: individuals, military, government, organizations and schools
- **Special Collections** - Court records, personal papers, school documents, scrapbooks, post office records and more
- **Subject files** – Clippings, articles, and primary materials from diverse places such as churches, clubs, schools, and businesses

DHC has a detailed website with information about our map collections, photographs, special collections and oral histories. Go to <http://www.dekalbhistory.org>
Before you schedule a visit to the Archives, look under the *Your Archives* section of the website for a partial listing of our holdings. This section is at the top of our webpage.

7. Internet resources

Ancestry.com

<http://www.ancestry.com>

This website, which is a paid subscription, is available free at the DHC and also at the Decatur Public Library and the Georgia Archives. You may find biographical information on your home owners via the US Census, military, and immigration records and other resources.

Atlanta Historic Newspapers Archive

<http://atlnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/atlnewspapers/search>

The Atlanta Historic Newspapers Archive provides online access to fourteen newspaper titles published in Atlanta from 1847 to 1922. Consisting of over 67,000 newspaper pages, the archive provides historical images that are both full-text searchable and can be browsed by date

Atlanta History Center

130 West Paces Ferry Road
Atlanta, 30305
404-814-4040

Email: reference@atlantahistorycenter.com

<http://www.atlantahistorycenter.com>

The AHC's Kenan Research Center has an online resource called *Terminus* that may be useful.

The Research Center has many archival resources including the largest collection of architectural plans for the metro area and building permits for properties within the city limits of Atlanta. They also have a large genealogy library.

Atlanta-Fulton Central Public Library

One Margaret Mitchell Square
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-730-1900

Email: referenceline@fultoncountyga.gov

<http://www.afpls.org/home>

The Atlanta-Fulton Central Public Library has a wealth of Atlanta materials and is well worth a visit. Do not forget other local public libraries when looking for information.

A library may use Library of Congress classification, or they may use the Dewey Decimal System. When browsing books at the library, books on researching houses have numbers beginning with **E159**. Dewey numbers in the **900s** include Geography and History. Having these numbers with you will get you the materials you need faster.

DeKalb County Public Library (Decatur Library)

Main Decatur Branch
215 Sycamore Street
Decatur, Georgia 30030
404-370-3070

<https://dekalblibrary.org/>

<https://dekalblibrary.org/research/subject-guides/genealogy>

The Georgia History Collection is on the third floor. There are also many genealogy resources.

In the reference area on the second floor, you will find these resources on microfilm or microfiche. You will need to get a lens from the reference desk in order to use the viewer.

- Atlanta City Directories beginning with 1902
- *Atlanta Constitution* index from 1925 - 1954

- *Atlanta Journal* index from 1944 - 1979
- Various DeKalb County newspapers from 1885 on
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, for the entire state
- *DeKalb New Era* from 1885—1998

Georgia Archives

You can view issues of The Atlanta Constitution from 1868 to 1984 in person at the Georgia Archives, Morrow GA. You can also conduct research online or in person.

<https://www.georgiaarchives.org/research>

Georgia Department of Revenue

<https://dor.georgia.gov/>

The website has information on other Georgia counties with online tax information and links in case you want to venture out of DeKalb County. Go to individual taxes and then property taxes for available information.

Georgia Historic Preservation Division (SHPO)

<http://georgiashpo.org/>

To look at materials in person, you must have an appointment. Contact HPDs National Register Specialist for more information. Before you call, click on the National Register & Survey tab at the top and then Research & Documentation for many answers to your questions, including a link for research files available there.

Georgia Statewide Deed Index

<http://www.gsccca.org/search/>

Available resources include lien & plat indexes and deeds.

Georgia State University Library

<http://www.library.gsu.edu/>

The Special Collections department has many documents and photos for the Atlanta area.

GNAHRGIS

<https://www.gnahrgis.org/gnahrgis/index.do>

GNAHRGIS is an interactive Web registry and geographical information system designed to catalog information about the natural, archaeological, and historic resources of Georgia. Historic resources include buildings, structures, historic sites, landscapes and districts.

National Register of Historic Places

<http://www.nps.gov/nr/research/>

If your home is located on the National Register of Historic Places or within a National Register district this Park Service site may provide invaluable information.

Newspapers.com

This pay service features most newspapers.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

<http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/sanborn/>

<https://research.library.gsu.edu/c.php?g=115461&p=755495>

The Sanborn Company began making maps for insurance purposes in the 1860s. There are many available for cities in Georgia. Maps from 1884-1922 are on this site. The Decatur Library has Georgia Sanborn Maps on microfilm. Because they were working documents, some copies of Sanborn Maps were updated by hand with company employees pasting overlays directly into later versions. If using these copies in person, information gathered may be less clear the information found in a “clean” copy.