Guide: Researching Your Norfolk Residential or Commercial Property

Since the burning of Norfolk in 1776 during the Revolutionary War, our preceding generations have continuously been building and rebuilding Norfolk. Over the years, entire neighborhoods and streets have been swept away and built anew. Norfolk’s remaining late 19th century through mid 20th century structures have undergone changes as well. As families grew in size, rooms and additions were added to houses. Changes in tastes and styles led to remodeling, which occasionally destroyed original architectural features. Exterior architectural items such as shutters, awnings and fences were removed to lower maintenance costs. During the Depression and World War II years, many of the large homes in the downtown area and in Ghent were converted into apartments and rooming houses, which necessitated the need for additional bathrooms and kitchens. The Algonquin, Edgewater, Larchmont, Ocean View and Talbot Park neighborhoods, formerly located in Norfolk County, were not annexed by the city until 1923.

If you are just starting out, here are a few steps you can take to learn more about the history of your property.

1. Perform a detailed inspection of the interior and exterior of your home or commercial building. Take notice of any visible changes; room additions, enclosed porches, newer exterior siding and updated kitchens, bathrooms & lighting fixtures.

2. Talk with your neighbors, especially those who have lived in for a long time in your area. They generally know much about the history of your neighborhood and of its individual homes and occupants.

3. Talk with previous owners. Inquire when they purchased the property and what repairs or improvements were done while they owned it.

4. Once you have finished gathering information from those different sources, there are a several other places you can visit to gain more information about the property.

Local places
- Norfolk Public Library – Sargeant Memorial Collection (Local History and Genealogy Collection)
- City of Norfolk: Assessor's Office
- Norfolk Circuit Court Clerk’s Office – Wills, Deeds, Land Books (1850 to Present), and Maps
- Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority
- City of Norfolk: Department of Planning and Community Development

State Level (typically if your building is historic, pre-1900)
Books to consult:

General Style:


Virginia:


Norfolk:

1. *Art Work of Norfolk and Vicinity (Virginia)*. Chicago: H.W. Kennicott & Co, 1895. Call # 975.5521 ART (Special Collections)

2. *Art Work of Norfolk, Virginia. Published in Nine Parts*. Chicago: Gravure Illustration Company, 1902. Call # 975.5521 ART (Special Collections)

3. Herman, Frederick. *Downtown West Historic Survey*. Norfolk, VA: Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, 1976. Call # 309.26 HER


13. Norfolk (VA). *Historic and Cultural Resources Inventory*. Norfolk: Dept. of City Planning, 1981. **Special Collections**


Norfolk History: History of Local Families:


2. Bruce, Philip Alexander. *Virginia; Rebirth of the Old Dominion*. Chicago: Lewis Pub. Co, 1929. **Call # 975.5 BRU**

3. Community Builders, Norfolk, VA. *Community Builders of Norfolk, Virginia*. S.l: s.n.], 1942. **Call # 920 COM**

4. Glass, Robert Camillus. *Virginia Democracy, A History of the Achievements of the Party and Its Leaders in the Mother of Commonwealths, the Old Dominion*. [Springfield, IL.]: Democratic Historical Association, 1937. **Call # 329.3 GLA**


7. Stewart, Robert Armistead and William Glover Stanard. *Index to Printed Virginia Genealogies, Including Key and Bibliography*. Richmond, VA: Old Dominion Press, 1930. **Call # 929.2 STEWART**


**Other Resources in the Sargeant Memorial Room to Consult:**

1. Vertical Files – Contains newspaper clippings, reports, and other items from the 1900s to the present about the City of Norfolk. The files are organized by subject matter. Example subjects: Buildings, Places, Biographies, etc.

2. Norfolk City Directories – Our collection starts about the mid-1850s and continues to present. Please see our “Finding Aids: Unlocking a Norfolk City Directory.”

3. Building Permits – *City of Norfolk Department of Public Works, Division of Building Inspection, 1893-1956 (RG 22-2016-001)* – Located in Special Collections and view record in SMC Archives Catalog.

4. Postcard Collection. **Please ask a staff member for assistance.**

5. Microfilm records:
   - Norfolk City Records (1600s to 1890s)
     - Deeds
     - Wills
     - Personal Property Tax/Land Tax
     - Order Books
   - City Council Minutes and Records; 1798 – 1979
   - Norfolk County Records (1600s to early 1800s)
     - Deeds
     - Wills
     - Order Books

6. Newspapers – Local newspapers from 1760 to Present (paper and microfilm)

7. Deed and Title Abstracts (Late 1700s to 1920s) *Guaranty Title and Trust Corporation (MSS 0000-052).* Located in Special Collections. **Please ask a staff member for assistance**

8. Photographs – Our collection contains over 60,000 images from the late 1800s to present. **Please ask a staff member for assistance.**

9. Plats and Maps:
   - Streets and subdivision maps from late 1800s to present
   - Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps – 1887 to 1960 (Book and online database)
   - Guaranty Title and Trust Corporation plats