

Williamson County Archives

Researching Historic Homes and Properties

Are you interested in learning about the history of your Williamson County home or property? This quick guide offers a brief description of the challenge of historical home and property research. In a growing community like Williamson County it is common for folks to purchase a home and grow curious about the house and/or the land on which it stands. People want to know who previously owned a house, that families' relationship to the local community, details on architectural features, or what type of industry may have taken place on the property.

Unfortunately, it is not always easy or even possible to track down answers to these historical questions. It is important to note that researching a *house* and researching a *property* are two different things. Both privately owned homes and land usually only intersect with county records through deeds, tax books, and sometimes probate records. Even then, it is typically easier to learn about a property as opposed to an actual house. The most useful and insightful information on historic homes usually comes from the publications and reflections of local historians who document people and places in their communities. Some of the books we recommend are:

- *Remembering Natchez Street and Natchez Street Area Revisited* by Thelma Battle
- *Historic Williamson County: Old Homes and Sites* by Virginia McDaniel Bowman
- *Gently Flows the Harpeth* by T. Vance Little
- *When Cotton Was King* by T. Vance Little
- *National Register Properties: Williamson County Tennessee* by Mary Shearer Pearce et al.
- *Back Home in Williamson County* by Lyn Sullivan Pewitt
- *Williamson County: Out There in the First District* by Rick Warwick
- *Historical Markers of Williamson County Tennessee: A Pictorial Guide* by Rick Warwick
- The *Williamson County Historical Society Journal* (Check the index for specific references.)

For general property research, the best sources available are deeds. Every time a property changes hands a deed is issued that notes the buyer (grantee) and seller (grantor) of the property. As a result, it is possible to follow the chain of ownership of a property by tracing the deeds. The Williamson County Register of Deeds is responsible for keeping the deeds for property in the county. If you need to begin tracing the deed of a home at any point after 1966, you will need to start tracing the deed at the Register of Deeds office.

Here in the Williamson County Archives Reading Room, we have deeds drafted prior to 1966 indexed and available on microfilm. Records useful for historic property research include:

- *Founding of the Cumberland Settlements* (Vol. I & II) by Doug Drake, Jack Masters, and Bill Puryear
- Sanborn Insurance Maps of Franklin (Restricted to Downtown Franklin)
- The Williamson County Historic Homes Survey from the Tennessee Historical Commission. A digital map of this survey is available at: <http://tnmap.tn.gov/historicalcommission/>
- Williamson County Deed Books
- Williamson County Tax Books
- Williamson County Probate Records
- Binders of local church, school, public building, and cemetery deeds compiled by Archives staff
- Subject files compiled by Archives staff

Once the chain of ownership of a property is established, it is then possible to do further research in the county records using family names identified on the deeds. Researchers can use probate, marriage, court, and tax records to piece together information about families that lived on a property at a certain point in time. It is important to remember that researching a home or property takes time and patience, and may require reaching out to community members with knowledge and memories that can enhance and supplement the information available in county records. The Williamson County Archives Reading Room contains several other historical resources to help you learn about our community history such as:

- Chancery, Circuit, and County Court Cases & Record Books
- Marriage Bonds and Licenses
- Williamson County and some Davidson County Newspapers
- TN Delayed Births, Births 1908-1912; TN Death Certificates 1908-1912, 1914-1964
- Wills and Will Books
- Probate Records
- Naturalizations
- The Thelma Battle Collection (African-American Genealogy)