



Find your house's history!

the Polk County version

Property research can be difficult and tedious. The best records for understanding property ownership are kept in Oregon at the county level. Before you make the trip into the county clerk's office to scroll through microfilm, here are some tips on how to get started researching property in Polk County. Use the resources below to help you fill out the attached property fact sheet.

1) Online County Assessor's Property Records

<https://apps2.co.polk.or.us/PSO>

Search your address to find current owner, date they bought the property, deed reference numbers, when the buildings on the property were built, and the legal description of the property, as well as its plat map. This can be useful for searching later on.

2) Online PCMAPS 5 [Polk County Geographic Reference Tool]

<https://maps.co.polk.or.us/pcmaps/>

This is an online resource that gives you access to all recorded surveys in Polk County. Search by address and get a list of clickable, digital images. In addition to gaining information about the property boundaries, you can also sometimes extrapolate some information for your ownership timeline based on the date the surveys were ordered. Remember that these surveys can be for other property than yours, so be discerning.

3) City & Rural Directories

Think of city and rural directories like a phone book, even before there were phones. They list individuals living in an area, their address and occupation. These directories help (along with other resources) to create a timeline of ownership. Dallas Public Library has the best selection of Polk County directories, followed by the Polk County Historical Society.

4) Historic Property Databases

<http://heritagedata.prd.state.or.us/historic/>

Use the Oregon Historic Sites Database to search by address, city, or county to see if your house is considered historic or is within an historic district. Oftentimes the applications for these designations include a lot research – already done!

5) Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

<https://www.loc.gov/maps/?q=polk+county,+oregon>

These maps were put out by the Fire Insurance Company and show an outline of all structures at a specific time. If your home or property is within city limits, you may find them. Polk County Oregon maps have been digitized by the Library of Congress and are available at their website.

6) Historic Metsker Maps

<https://www.historicmapworks.com>

For rural properties, the Metsker map series may be a better choice. Use the **search** tab (upper left corner) of the Historic Map Works site, then click the **location** tab in the advanced section and put in the geographical location of the property. The Metsker series available online for Polk County dates to 1929 and 1962. For additional reference, a 1942 physical copy of the Polk County Metsker map is available at the State Library of Oregon.

7) USGS Historical Map Viewer

<https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/viewer/#4/40.00/-100.00>

The USGS series of topographic maps are a great resource for rural properties and a way to observe changes to the landscape over time. Search by location and use the slider to view available historic maps. Maps range from 1880-current year, depending on location.

8) Google Earth

<https://www.google.com/earth/>

Free and powerful tool. When looking up an area, you can often scroll through past aerial photography. Depending on the location, you can go back to images from the mid-1990s.

9) Online Historic Photo Sites

There are a number of online searchable databases of historic photos that may prove helpful in your research. Remember to be creative with your search terms, the person that photographed or cataloged the image may not have had the address. Look by city, neighborhood, county, and owner names.

- **Oregon Historic Photos Database:** <http://photos.salemhistory.net/>
- **Oregon State Library Photos Database:** https://ccrls.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/oslpublic-- click on Photograph Collection. These are searchable databases of historic photos. Sometimes you can get lucky!
- **Oregon Historical Society Research Library Catalog:** <https://librarycatalog.ohs.org/O90000/OPAC/Index.aspx>
- **Library of Congress, Farm Security Administration Images:** <https://loc.gov/collections/fsa-owi-black-and-white-negatives/index/location/?fa=location:oregon> – click on Polk County or the individual cities within county boundaries

10) Oregon Digital Newspaper Project

<https://oregonnews.uoregon.edu/>

Searches for names of past residents, City Additions, or street names can provide additional clues for property history.

11) GLO [General Land Office] Records

www.glorerecords.blm.gov/search/

Ever wonder who owned your property before your house was built? In Oregon, much of the land was “claimed” starting in the mid-19th century by Oregon Trail emigrants. These land claim records are searchable online if you know the legal description of the property (Township, Range, Section). If the property is within city limits, you can derive this information from the County Assessor’s map tax lot number. The first 6 – 7 digits will give you Township, Range and Section of your property (i.e. 073W34AB11300 is Township 7 S, Range 3 West, Section 34). Remember, a section is a square mile (640 acres) and most land claims weren’t

regularly shaped or always within a section. Also, click down on the tab below that reads “Surveys” and enter the legal description to get surveys of the land from the 1850s and 1860s.

12) Museums and Other Historical Societies

There are a number of museums and other historical societies in the area that may have information that pertains to your house, the property around it or the people that lived there. They may also have staff on hand to help with your research questions. Places to consider for help:

- Willamette Heritage Center [WHC] www.willametteheritage.org
- Polk County Historical Society www.polkcountyhistoricalsociety.org
- Heritage Museum in Independence www.ci.independence.or.us/museum

Remember different institutions index collections differently. At the WHC we are more likely to find photos indexed with people names rather than just addresses. So the more information, including owners, that you come prepared with, the better the chances of success!

13) Other Clues

Architecture, construction styles, old newspapers stapled to the rafters, even the stories from your neighbors or folks that used to live there can help build the history of your house. If you find something or hear something, write it down!

14) Polk County Property Records [Deeds]

<https://www.co.polk.or.us/assessor/search-tools-applications>

Property records for Polk County reside at the Polk County Clerk’s office and can be accessed online through the **Search Tools** portion of the county website.

Be aware, these records are kind of difficult to work with. The records are indexed in two ways – direct indexes and indirect indexes to property deeds which give either the buyer or the seller’s names in alpha order for a specific time period. Start with **Clerk’s Direct/Indirect Search of Historical Index**. Follow the instructions on the page to select the book type and book [timeframe] from the dropdown menus on the left. Then put the last name of the property owner in the box. This is where your timeline of property owners comes into play. Using it for reference, you should be able to narrow down the time frame.

Once a search has been completed, digitized images of the index will be displayed. Carefully search the list (sorted by year, and roughly alphabetized within the applied category). Compare the information recorded with known property details (township, range, etc.) to identify the entry. Record the information in each entry noting in particular the deed book and page. Take this information to the **Historical Deed Search** option on the main Search Tools page. Follow the instructions on the page to select the book type and input the book letter [or number] and page. Once a search has been completed, digitized images of the deed record book will be displayed. Carefully read through the document to match information and for further clues and information regarding the transfer of property.



Property Fact Sheet

Address:

Legal Description:

Block:_____ Addition: _____

Township: _____ Range: _____ Section: _____

Assessor's Records:

Property ID: _____

Date of Last Sale: _____

Owner Name: _____

Deed Number: _____

Donation Land Claim

Certificate No. _____

Claimant: _____

Notes:

Resident Timeline