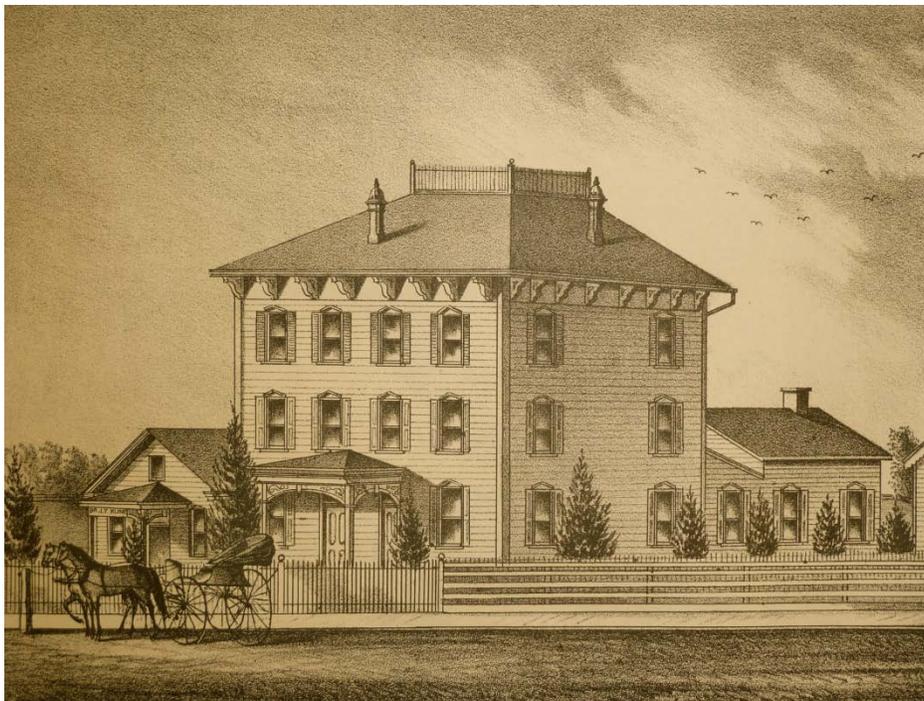


# House History Guide to Resources at the Lancaster County Archives



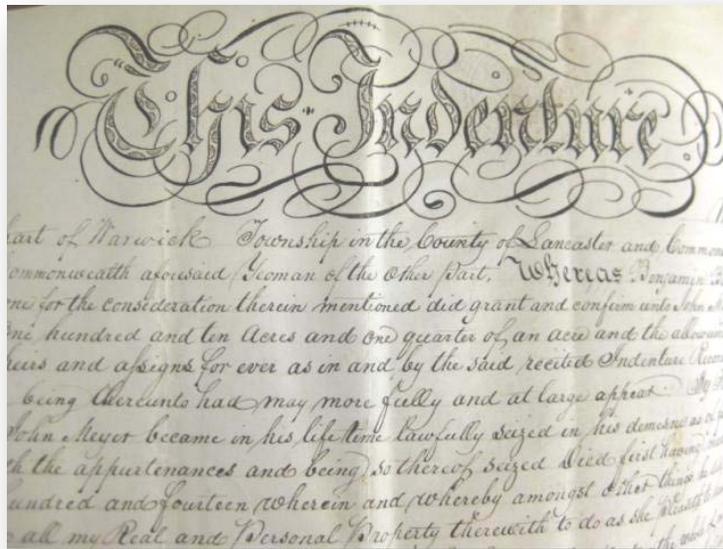
Every old home has a story to be told. The fact that it has stood the test of time is a testament to its builder and more importantly a tangible link to the past. Historic houses survive as a physical record of the individuals that lived in them over time. Since walls do not talk we cannot rely on the physical form or 'bricks and mortar' of an old home to tell its history. Written records within the Lancaster County Archives can provide answers and reveal direct evidence of your home's history. Written documents often explain the physical evidence of your home's history by illuminating the lives of the people that once lived in the home. The following sources are suggestions for beginning your search for the history of your home at the Lancaster County Archives.

## Deeds

Begin your house history research by finding deeds to your home. Deeds are the framework of your home's history and have been recorded since 1729. Start by looking at your property deed and always work backwards through time. Recent property deeds can be searched through the Lancaster County Recorder of Deeds office [www.lancasterdeeds.com](http://www.lancasterdeeds.com). Deeds index books 1729-1980 are available here at the Lancaster County Archives and are arranged by the grantee (buyer) name and grantor (seller) name. Deeds are further indexed by the date they were recorded.

Once you have a deed reference, it may be possible to track the chain of ownership back through time by looking at each previous deed reference.

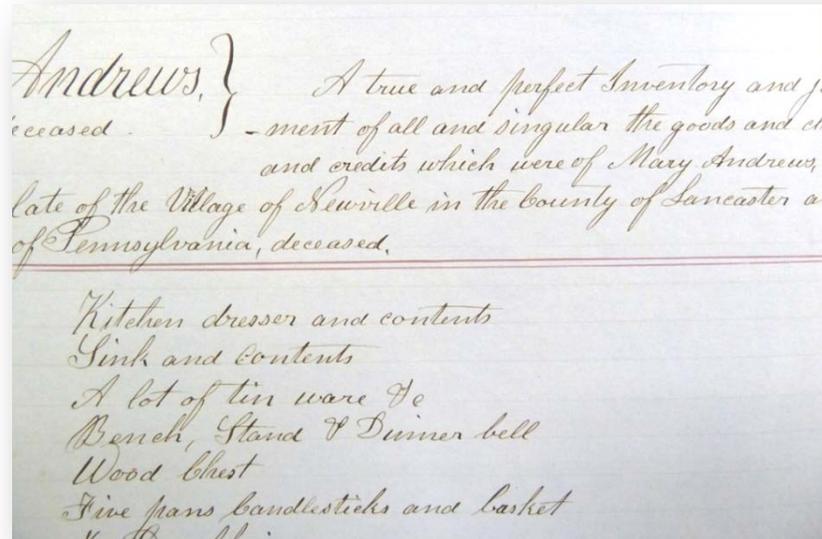
As you research deeds back through time you will be creating a 'chain of title.' This is a list of names and dates for all the people that owned your home and it forms the basis of all your research. Fortunately all deeds have a pattern containing key pieces of information. Keep a log and extract the following information. "This indenture made" is the date the deed was agreed upon but may be entirely different from the date that appears in the court records. The "recording date" appears at the end of the deed and represents the date it was taken to the courthouse to be recorded. Some deeds were recorded over 100 years after they were drawn up and this may be the reason why they are not appearing in the index books. Some deeds were never recorded and may be found within the "Unrecorded Deed Index" kept within the archives. "In consideration of" is the purchase price and any substantial differences over time could mean possible additions or improvements to a home. "It being the part of that same lot" or "being the same premises" is known as the *recital* and provides the previous deed reference to search. The term "messuage" appearing in deeds is a legal term that means dwelling and it can be reasonably inferred that there was a home on the property. Finally always note the buyer and seller names.





### **Inventory Records**

When an individual died without a will the courts required an inventory of the personal estate to be filed within 30 days. Inventory records reveal the material contents of a historic home at a certain point in time. They may be clues as to the owner's occupation as well as their economic status. Next to photographs, they are the closest thing to going back in time and peering inside the window of a home to see its furnishings.



### **Unrecorded Deeds**

If you are not finding a deed reference check the deed indexes for several years after the date you believe the property may have been sold. Deeds may have been recorded by succeeding owners many years after they were made. Some deeds may have never been recorded. Check the Unrecorded Deed Index within the archives.

### **Getting Personal: Birth, Marriage, and Death Records**

Once you have the chain of title start researching the former owners of the home through the records of the archives. The most interesting history of your home is connected to its owners. The archives has several sources of vital records which may lead to fascinating personal details. Many individuals were born and married in the homes they lived in. Perhaps a wedding was once held at your home. Death records at the archives provide the dates to further research newspaper obituaries. Funerals were also typically held at homes in the past. Wills may reveal small details about your property or provide the occupation of its owner. Many occupations were performed at the home in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

### **Additional Steps**

After you have gathered all the details about the property owners you can begin to piece together a more complete picture of your historic home over time. Information gathered at the archives may lead to additional sources kept at other organizations. Census records, city directories, family files, photographs and newspapers kept at Lancaster's historical society ([www.lancasterhistory.org](http://www.lancasterhistory.org)) may provide further information. In addition, the *Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster* maintains files for over 10,000 historic properties across Lancaster County. Go beyond preserving your old home to telling its unique history. Begin your search at the Lancaster County Archives.