

HISTORIC RED HOOK

Tracing Your House's Roots

By Emily Majer

Researching your home is a great way to explore the history of your community, see how your home fits into local patterns of architecture, learn about the people who lived there before, and forge a connection with the past for a more multi-faceted view of the present...and the future.

Where to begin?

That depends on what you want to know.

If you want to determine the style of your house and from that, extrapolate the date it was built, Virginia McAlester's [A Field Guide to American Houses](#) is a good reference. Be aware that the way that your house looks now may bear little resemblance to the way it looked when built.



photos courtesy Maynard Ham

The prior owner may have given you some information about your house. Your neighbors can likely contribute as well and the Red Hook Building Department (Town Hall at 7340 Route 9) may have permits on file describing later renovations.

For straight up facts, you can start by going online to <http://geoaccess.co.dutchess.ny.us/parcelaccess/> (works best with browsers other than Safari). There you can; locate your property, get deed information (liber and page numbers for searching at the County Clerk's office), see how your house is sited in relation to roads and other buildings, and also look at aerial photos dating back to 1936 to look for changes to the property.

Historic Red Hook has maps (online and in the archives) of the village and town which, in most cases, show the names of property owners.

- 1891 F.W. Beers Atlas
- 1876 W. Gray & Son Atlas
- 1867 F.W. Beers Atlas
- 1858 John E. Gillette Atlas
- 1850 John E. Gillette Atlas

Some of the village maps have accompanying business directories that offer glimpses of what life was like at the time of publication. Sanborn's Fire Insurance Co. maps (1892-1942) illustrate the presence and placement of buildings quite accurately and also show details such as roof style.



Once you have linked some names with your house, U.S. Census data (1790-1940) is available online for free at familysearch.org. These records offer all kinds of information about the prior residents. Each decade is slightly different, but you will find names (only heads of household prior to 1850), ages, occupations, value of real estate owned, literacy, birthplace of parents, level of education and other interesting facts.

A photograph of a historical document, possibly a census record or land deed, showing a grid of text. The document is a large table with many columns and rows of text, typical of a census or land record. The text is small and dense, and the document is framed by a dark border.

If social history appeals to you, there are many more resources to explore. Historic Red Hook has church records, family histories, genealogical books, newspaper archives, photographs and minutes of town meetings dating back to 1818. There are land records, family bibles and files on a range of topics (specific houses, families or themes) compiled by local history enthusiasts who have come before you!

Emily Majer is a Trustee of Historic Red Hook. She is currently earning a Master's Degree in Historic Preservation from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.