

Researching Your House From the Comfort of Your House

By Chris Roy

Everywhere you look, someone's building a house in Tremont. But even if development seems ubiquitous, the reality is that older – sometimes *really older* – homes in Tremont vastly outnumber the younger ones. In fact, there are more Tremont homes built in the 19th century than in the 20th and 21st centuries combined.

Perhaps you're the owner or occupant of one of those "older" homes and you'd like to know more about it. This article looks at how you can find out more about where you live, all from the comfort of where you live. All you need is an Internet connection.

Your first stop is the Cuyahoga County Auditor's website, where you can discover some of your home's physical specifics.

1. Enter <http://fiscalofficer.cuyahogacounty.us> into the address bar of your browser and hit "enter" or "return." You'll reach a window referring to the Fiscal Officer site for the County of Cuyahoga.
2. Click on the plus (+) sign next to "Real Property" along the left task bar.
3. From the list that appears, select "Real Property Information." You'll then see a list of choices to the right – one of which will say "Online Property Search."
4. Click on "Online Property Search." You'll then reach a window that says "Choose one method of searching for your property" at the top.
5. Select "By Address" (the right-most tab).
6. Enter your house number. You must use five digits, so if your house number is "1234," enter it as "01234."
7. Enter your street name. Use only the primary name, e.g., "Literary" rather than "Literary Road." Important: If you live on a numbered street, just type a number, such as "11" if you live on West 11th Street.
8. From the city drop-down menu, select "Cleveland West/River" and click search. This should take you to a page that specifically identifies your house. *Note: The website is not perfect; build dates are sometimes wrong and there are homes that the site does have in its files. If you get a "not found" message, go back and check your inputs. If they are correct, there may nothing more you can do. Sorry.*
9. Write down the eight-digit Parcel ID number on the left. You'll need this for other research endeavors.
10. Click on the eight-digit Parcel ID number. This will take you to a page where, when you click on the various tabs, you can see your home's financial specifics; most recent sale price; appraised value and quality; the year the home was built, and lots of other information.

Your next stop is the website of the *Cuyahoga County Fiscal Officer* (formerly the County Recorder). Here you can discover (and view) deed information – including many, if not all, the people who owned your house previously.

1. Begin by typing recorder.cuyahogacounty.us/searchs/generalsearchs.aspx into your browser and hitting "enter." This will take you to the site's home page.
2. In the green space to the left, select Search Database / Parcel Search.
3. In the space to the right of "Enter Recording Date" substitute something much earlier, say "1/1/1900."

4. Type in the permanent parcel number you wrote down during your search through the County Auditor's site (no dashes: just the eight-digit number).
5. Click on the Begin Search button.
6. The next page you reach will contain a list of previous owners. Click on the "AFN" number of whichever owner you wish to view.

Another online resource is *People Maps*—online maps of Cleveland going back to 1852. This is a fun way to see "the old neighborhood." Moreover, scores of streets and homes have disappeared as a result of freeway incursion, so you can also what various areas used to look like. You'll also see how street names have changed. In some cases, the reason for the change may not be known. However, before 1906, there were no numbered streets in Cleveland. For example, West 7th Street was University Street, West 10th Street was Pelton Avenue, West 11th Street was Merchant Avenue and so on. To see a complete list of what Cleveland's numbered streets were called before 1906, check out <http://ech.cwru.edu/Resource/text/SNC.html>.

To use People Maps . . .

1. Enter <http://peoplemaps.esri.com/cleveland> into your browser. This will bring you to a wide scale map of Cleveland.
2. Type Tremont into the search box at the upper left and hit "enter." This will take you to a map that narrows the screen to the Tremont area. Similar to Google Maps, you can move around by single-clicking and holding the left mouse, and sliding the cursor around. You can zoom in or out by selecting Zoom In or Zoom Out from the drop-down View tab at the top of the screen.
3. When you reach the area and zoom level you want, click on the small four-box square at the top right of the task bar. This will allow you to choose a variety of "map years": 1852–2016.
4. Continue to move about the screen and change locations, zoom levels and map years whenever you want.

At this point you may start discovering some information discrepancies. For example, the County Auditor's site might state that 2112 West 7th Street was built in 1860. However, when you look at an 1874 People Maps map of West 7th (then University Street), you'll see that there were no houses there then. More digging is clearly required, but the most likely conclusion is that the Auditor's site was wrong. By the way, if the Auditor's site says your home was built in 1930, don't believe it: "1930" is a sort of ad hoc code for "we don't know when your house was built." Given that 1930 was the first year of the Great Depression, very few homes were built anywhere.

Historical maps from the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company (1867 to 1970) show details of buildings (including construction materials, use of buildings, and name of owners), streets, lot lines, and neighborhood infrastructure like roads and water mains. Because the maps were published at different times, each one shows a snapshot of the neighborhood in a different historical era. To access Sanborn Maps . . .

1. Enter <http://ohioweblibrary.org/sanborn>
2. Enter your library card number. To our knowledge, this site is not accessible to people who don't have a library card.
3. Select your library (the one where you obtained your card).
4. Enter "Cleveland" where the next pages says "Enter a City Name."
5. Select "all date ranges" from near the top of the list at the left.
6. Select "street address" from the list that appears next. Enter just the street (no house number) you wish to research. Alternatively, you may find it more fruitful to search by intersection rather than by address.
7. On the next screen, you'll see a variety of choices. Click wherever you want and explore.

Please note that the Sanborn Map site has a ton of choices and is tricky to work. You may have to play around with it to get what you want. Not all streets are searchable so you may have to type in streets near where you want to look (e.g., Literary, rather than West 7th).

Your final online source is the *Plain Dealer Historical Database* which contains scanned articles from the Cleveland Plain Dealer going back more than 150 years. You may not find a lot about your specific house here (exceptions include in-home wake announcements, newsworthy incidents and ads for property for sale) but you may find some fun information about your neighborhood.

1. Access the Cleveland Public Library by typing www.cpl.org into your browser.
2. From the Research tab, click [Research Databases](#).
3. Scroll down to, and click on, [Plain Dealer Historical \(1845-1991\)](#).
4. Enter your library card number and password (your password is usually the last four digits of the phone number the library has on file for you).
5. In the New Search section at the top left, type in any Tremont topic you like. For example, next to the All Text box, you might try "Professor Avenue." If you put your term in quotes, the system will only show you results with the exact phrase you've entered.
6. You then see a list of articles that relate to your search topic. Simply click on any article to view it and hit the back button to return to the list.

Have fun!

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