

BURLINGTON WATCHMAN

VOL. 2, NO.1

JANUARY, 1990

How to research your property

(Editor's Note: *Now that the Foundation has initiated its Plaque Program, we asked resident preservationist and HBPF Trustee, Carl Lybeck, to share some advice on how to conduct the research necessary to obtain a plaque. This article, containing Carl's words of wisdom, will be followed in subsequent newsletters with other articles based upon research which has been compiled on buildings that have been awarded plaques.*)

After documenting a house, 232 Wood Street, to obtain a plaque from the Historic Burlington Preservation Foundation, I was asked to write an article that might help others interested in researching their properties. The first step in the process is to obtain all the information available on the title to your property. Find, if possible, the earliest maps of your area and look for the names of any persons having prior ownership of your property.

The next step would be to take a trip to the Courthouse complex in Mt Holly, NJ. Take along a pad and a couple of pencils (pens are not allowed in the deed rooms). Never mark a legal instrument; if errors are found, report them to an employee of the clerk's office. Sometimes the researcher's interpretation of a hand written document, rather than the document itself, is in error. If you have any questions for which you cannot find answers, ask other people researching (I have always found them to be helpful, but do not be a pest).

The Books of Deeds dating from 1921 to the present are on the entrance level of the County Clerk's Office. Earlier deeds are on the lower level. Each deed, no matter how early, usually refers to the preceding deed.

To begin, look up your deed in the Grantee Index (grantee is the one to whom the property is given) and note the grantor (the one giving up title to the property, usually for a monetary consideration). This will refer you to a book on file and its page number. When you find a

deed describing your property, transcribe the following information: book and page number, dates, names of people concerned, and boundary lines which grow and diminish over the years. Using a separate page in your note pad for each deed will help you keep clear and accurate records. When you look into the files of these old documents, you will find that they are very fragile and deserve a great deal of respect when being handled.

Sometimes you will become hung up on a deed that has no references to prior ownership. Most likely the owner died and left the estate to another. Many times deeds were not transferred at this time. At this point a trip to the Burlington County Library is in order. Sign into the New Jersey room, go to the calendar of wills which is indexed according to date, look up your last owner or grantee, then back track the name of the person in the deed index most likely to be grantor in the previous transfer. Also mortgage indices can sometimes be helpful.

To refresh my memory, I researched my house on Wood Street and found it was built on the site of a double frame house built by Samuel Stockton and sold once in 1803 and once in 1804. Many families lived in the two houses including Dr Franklin Guantt, well known Burlington physician who was one of the first to recognize the germ theory of disease. In the year 1887, Mr Robert Frankwood bought the properties and demolished them, combined the lots with a lot on East Union Street and built his large home there. In 1921, his son sold the front of the lots facing Wood Street to Mr & Mrs Hancock who proceeded in 1924 to build the present house.

If you begin your title research project and run into difficulty finding a piece of information, contact the Historic Burlington Preservation Foundation and discuss your problem. Hopefully, someone may have had a similar situation and may suggest some additional recourse.

C.L.

The Town Crier

§The *Cafe Gallery* looks wonderful with the addition of the wrought iron fence.

This is a great example of patience while searching for just the "right touch" for one's home or surrounding grounds...§Anyone seeking a lifetime restoration project, check out 302 Wood Street...§Please contact your City Council representative to express your displeasure concerning an ongoing tree removal program. It seems the City will remove trees solely for the convenience

of a resident. We cannot tolerate needless butchering of one of our city's finest attributes...§The Foundation has a limited number of *snazzy tee-shirts* available. "Get them while they last"...§Plans are progressing for our *architectural salvage program*. Stay tuned for further information...§The *Night on the Bayou dinner* was the talk

of the town. If you missed this affair, do not miss the next offering. Many thanks to *Jim & Barbara Fisher and Tom & Marlene Edgar* for their tremendous contribution in making the evening a success...§*Bob Thompson's* architectural history class from Burlington County College enjoyed an extensive walking tour of our city. We need more positive exposure of this nature...§Work has begun at the *McNeal Mansion*. The opening date for phase one is the summer of 1990...§Our *Plaque Program* is officially in full swing. The proper forms are now available, so please contact one of the Trustees to obtain your application...§The one hundred block of *East Union Street* is quickly becoming a stellar example of "block cooperation" during large scale restoration. Cooperation is a large factor in the transformation of this area...

T.C.