A Guide to researching building history in Lethbridge

Adapted from: A Guide to Researching Building History, The City of Calgary Archives, Heritage Advisory Board
Before you start your research, contact us at the Lethbridge Historical Society. The Lethbridge Historical Society routinely researches buildings and houses in Lethbridge as part of our outreach for our Facebook pages, to support designation requests, to draft historic plaques and more. We may have already done some research on the building you’re interested in and could help speed up your research process.

Site-Specific Information

There are two types of information related to historic buildings: site-specific information and contextual information. Building research usually starts with site-specific information which provides details about:

- Date of construction
- Name of the builder and/or company
- Name of the architect and/or company
- Original layout and appearance of building
- Assessed value of property at the time of construction and over time
- Renovations, physical improvements and additions
- Original and subsequent owners
- Original and subsequent uses of the building
- Original and subsequent occupants, businesses and organizations associated with the building
- Relationship to adjacent buildings and surrounding community

Site information can be found in an assortment of public and private sources. While written sources and documents will be vital for research, do not forget that interviewing neighbours, present-day occupants and historians may also provide valuable research material.

Researchers should be aware that it is likely that not all of this information may be found for a particular building. Sometimes the information no longer exists. Other times the information never existed.
1. Alberta Registries and Land Titles

One step in researching a building is to identify and/or prove the title of the land on which the building sits. A land title search may provide:

- Details about past and present ownership
- Lot size, and changes to lot size over time
- Mortgages and liens registered against the property

There are different levels related to a land title search. To initiate a land title, it is first necessary to provide a legal description of the property. Legal descriptions can be found by contacting the Assessment & Taxation Department of the City of Lethbridge:

403-320-3950
assessment@lethbridge.ca

In addition to contacting the Assessment & Taxation department directly, this information may be accessed from the City of Lethbridge’s interactive maps. Go to Living Here → Interactive WebMaps. Under Interactive WebMaps, select Property Information. Click the green map at the top of the page and a drop down menu will allow you to search for the property address. The Property Information Sheet shows the legal description, roll number, area and more.

Land titles searches may be conducted at a private registry in the province. The cost of the land title search will vary depending on the depth of the search (for example, how old the property is and how many different owners have held title). For a regular search, the cost per title is $10.00 at Land Titles. Additional fees may be charged by the Registry Agent. To obtain a copy of a survey plan, the Land Titles charge is $2.00.

There are different types of searches:

**Regular Search**

- Can provide land title information. This type of title search may be done through any private registry.
- This is a current search and will only provide information on the current state of the title including the owners and instruments registered on the title.

**Historical Search**

- This type of search permits the researcher to gather information on a specific land title holder, provided the researcher has the appropriate paperwork such as a Writ of Enforcement. Research may request that a historical search end at a specific date or that the search be a “Back-to-Patent” Search. A “back-to-patent” search provides all land title transaction throughout the history of the property. This is a request that a historical search be done all the way back to the first patent of the land. This search provides the historical information on the current title and is done through a cancelled title search which provides information on all previous owners and instrument registration information. Remember that as there is a cost per title, these types of searches can be costly if the property has had numerous owners.
Note: The name of the owner, which is provided by the land title search, does not necessarily mean that that person was a resident of the property. The ownership (title) of a property may give some suggestion as to the date of a building but will not show exactly when a building was constructed. As with all historical research, information gathered from one source should be compared with other information gathered. Try to find confirmation from at least two sources.

2. Local Archives

There are several places in Lethbridge and southern Alberta where research may be conducted. It will likely be necessary to contact one or more of these locations.

Galt Archives
Galt Museum & Archives
403-329-7302
archives@galtmuseum.com

The Galt Archives searchable online database can be found on the Research page, which can be accessed at www.galtmuseum.com

City of Lethbridge Archives & Records Management
David.sarsfield@lethbridge.ca

Senator Buchanan Room
Lethbridge Public Library, Downtown Branch
403-380-7310
questions@lethlib.ca

The Senator Buchanan Room is the local history collection and includes community history books, yearbooks, street directories and more. To use, you must sign in at the information desk at the library. The library (at both branches) also provides free access to Ancestry. You must be at the library to access Ancestry and it can be done on the library computers or on your own device.

University of Lethbridge Archives
403-329-2714
Mike.perry@uleth.ca

The U of L Archives may be particularly useful in providing information related to University of Lethbridge buildings. May also provide context for West-Side development in Lethbridge.
3 Municipal Directories and Telephone Books

There are a variety of municipal directories and telephone books that are useful in providing supplementary information about owners and properties. As with all sources, it is important to remember that mistakes can be made in these sources; sometimes they were not up to date even at the time of publication. Additionally, street names and addresses were sometimes changed so a modern address may not correspond to a historic address. When researching Lethbridge buildings, it is important to note that prior to 1910 all streets and avenues had names rather than numbers.

The area of Staffordville (north of 9 Avenue North and west of 13 Street North) maintained its street names until it was annexed by Lethbridge in 1913.

Hardieville had a few different street numbering systems over the years.

The Henderson Directory can be searched through a street address, resident’s name or business name. Inclusion in the directory was voluntary so these records are not always complete. Henderson Directories can provide information related to residence, occupation, other family members and more.

Some Henderson Directories for Lethbridge may be found on-line through the Peel Collection. At present some directories between 1914 and 1953 are available.

Peel’s Prairie Provinces – University of Alberta
Peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/3438.html

The Galt Archives has a complete set of Henderson Directories from 1909 to 2000. These can only be accessed onsite.

The Senator Buchanan Room at the Lethbridge Public Library also has a complete set of Lethbridge Henderson Directories. These can be accessed onsite at the Downtown Library Branch.

Lethbridge telephone directories can be found at various locations. The Senator Buchanan Room at the Lethbridge Public Library has a good inventory of most telephone directories. The Galt Archives also has several directories.

The Medicine Hat & District Genealogical Society has digitized most the Telephone Books and Yellow Pages for Lethbridge and area. These can be accessed at:
https://mhdgs.ca/phonebooks.html

4. Historical Maps

Fire insurance plans are detailed maps and are useful for building research. These plans provide such information as:

- Layout of buildings
- Building location on the lot
Many of the fire insurance plans can be found at the Galt Archives. The Galt also has several other types of historical maps of the city.

Some fire insurance plans may also be found online through the University of Lethbridge Library Digitized Collections (under Galt Museum & Archives).

http://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/cdm/landingpage/collection/galt

The Lethbridge Place Names book provides great information related to the naming of places in Lethbridge and contains maps showing the growth of Lethbridge. It is important while researching older properties to note that prior to 1910 all roads in Lethbridge had names and not numbers. The Lethbridge Place Names book, as well as old insurance maps, and some older Henderson Directories include lists showing old street names and modern street names. This book is presently out of date but may be accessed through the Galt Archives and the Lethbridge Public Library.

Richard Stafford’s map of the river valley. Galt Archives P19640506000
5. Architectural Plans

Public and large buildings may have blueprints or architectural drawings available for study. The City of Lethbridge may have architectural plans for public city buildings. Plans may also be found for some buildings through the Provincial Archives, Glenbow Archives and Galt Archives.

The **Canadian Architectural Archives (CAA)**, connected with the University of Calgary Library, has a mandate to collect works related to 20\textsuperscript{th} century Canadian architects. Information on their collections may be found at [http://caa.ucalgary.ca/collections](http://caa.ucalgary.ca/collections)

When looking for architectural plans, the first step is to find the name of the architect as many architectural plans would be filed by the name of the architect. For large public buildings, the architect is often noted in newspaper accounts on the construction and/or opening of the building. Cornerstones and plaques are also often useful resources for finding the names of architects and contractors associated with a building.

6. Historical Photographs

There are a few main locations for finding historical photographs:

**Galt Archives** (Lethbridge)

**Glenbow Archives** (Calgary) – Please note that the Glenbow Archives has recently relocated to the University of Calgary from the Glenbow Museum.

**Provincial Archives** (Edmonton)

**Senator Buchanan Room** (Lethbridge Public Library)

While looking for a building, it is important to recognize that while prominent buildings may be listed under their own names, sometimes a broader search may be necessary. Search under the names of people connected to the property, nearby sites, events, street or avenue names or even neighbourhood name.

The **Galt Archives**, **Glenbow Archives** and **Provincial Archives** all have online databases and contact information for the archives is provided. In general, there are costs associated with ordering copies of photographs but not for using the database.

The **Lethbridge Public Library** has a large five-volume collection of photographs of Lethbridge buildings. These photographs were taken in 1980 and provide one of the largest collections of built heritage in Lethbridge. The Lethbridge Public Library in partnership with the University of Lethbridge Library has digitized this collection. This collection, called the **“Lethbridge Landmarks City Photo Collection”** can be accessed at [http://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/cdm/landingpage/collection/cityphotos](http://digitallibrary.uleth.ca/cdm/landingpage/collection/cityphotos)
The Lethbridge Landmarks City Photo Collection includes the same photographs as in the print collection as well as much (but not all) of the descriptive comments about each site. A map is also available that geo-locates SOME (not all) of the building photographs on a map of the City of Lethbridge.

7. Local Newspapers

Buildings are often mentioned in the newspaper at the time of their construction or opening, following a fire or accident, or for important anniversaries and occasions. This is especially true for older buildings and for the pre First World War period. Remember, though, newspaper accounts are not always accurate.

The Lethbridge Herald has been digitized and is available through the University of Lethbridge. The Herald archives can be found at:
https://universityoflethbridge.newspaperarchive.com

The University of Lethbridge Library has several digitized collections which may be of use to researchers. Among them are the Lethbridge Historical Society newsletters and some of our publications/books. There is also the Southern Alberta Newspaper Collection (which includes copies of the Lethbridge News and some of the Lethbridge Herald).
These can be accessed through:
https://digitallibrary.uleth.ca

8. Government Surveys and Inventories of Historic Buildings

Over the years Lethbridge buildings have appeared in several different surveys, inventories and websites.

A complete survey of all historic buildings in Lethbridge can be found at the Galt Archives and in the Provincial Archives. This survey provides information on all buildings 50+ years of age. The survey,
organized by street and address, provides information on ownership, architecture, changes and additions to the building and some history. The survey also includes a photograph of the building. These can be found in binders at the Galt Museum & Archives.

As part of its Municipal Heritage Program, the City of Lethbridge has conducted several inventories. Prior to a building being designated a Municipal Historic Resource, the building is evaluated and listed on the City of Lethbridge Inventory of Historic Places. These inventories provide detailed information about the building on a variety of subjects including past and present ownership, building function over time, and architectural details. These inventories can be accessed through the City’s website at:

https://www.lethbridge.ca/Doing-Business/Planning-Development/Historic-Building-Preservation/Pages/default.aspx

Buildings designated as Municipal Historic Resources as well as those designated as Provincial Historic Resources are also listed on the Alberta Register of Historic Places. Information provided here includes a Statement of Significance for each building which outlines what makes the building historically valuable:

City of Lethbridge sites can be accessed through a list:

https://www.lethbridge.ca/Doing-Business/Planning-Development/Historic-Building-Preservation/Pages/Historic-Resources.aspx

or an interactive map that provides addresses and additional information:

https://gis.lethbridge.ca/lethexplorer/index.html?config=config-historicplaces.xml

The City of Lethbridge sites as well as all Alberta sites can be accessed through:
A building may also be placed on the Canadian Register of Historic Places (Canada's Historic Places). This register is a searchable database containing information about recognized historic places of local, provincial, territorial or national significance:


9. Plaques, Cornerstones and Monuments

Many older buildings were graced with cornerstones at the time of construction. These stones can provide information regarding date of construction, architect and more. It is necessary to do a site search of many older, public buildings in order to see if a cornerstone exists.

Over the last number of years, the City of Lethbridge and Lethbridge Historical Society have worked to recognize important historic sites and events in Lethbridge with historic plaques. These plaques can be used to provide useful information related to the history of a property. A smaller plaque, located underneath the information plaque, identifies the building as a Municipal Historic Resource.

A self-guided tour of all historic building plaques in the downtown can be picked up from the Lethbridge Historical Society or the Heart of Our City Revitalization Committee (City of Lethbridge) and at various sites around the community. This information can be accessed at: https://www.lethbridgehistory.org/monumental-lethbridge

10. Census and Obituary Information

Sometimes the historical value of a building is specifically related to a past or present owner of the building. As you research, collect the names of all the people associated with the building. There are various ways to find information on a person beyond those already listed in this document.
Canadians censuses up to 1926 are available online. An online search for “1901 Canadian Census” or 1906, 1911, or 1916 will provide a few web-sites for census information. Spelling mistakes (or older versions of a surname) are common for census records so be prepared to try your search under surname, location, etc. Please also be aware that in the 1911 Census Lethbridge is in the Medicine Hat district.

https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/Pages/census.aspx

The Genealogical Society of Alberta, Lethbridge & District Branch, is a great source for finding information related to individuals and families.

Lethbridge & District Branch, Alberta Genealogical Society
Rm.128  909 - 3rd Avenue North
Lethbridge, Alberta T1H 0H5
Phone: (403)328-9564
lethags@theboss.net

The Lethbridge Genealogical Society has several online links for finding obituary dates.

http://lethbridgeags.theboss.net/LH.htm

One of the digital collections at the University of Lethbridge site is the Bruce Haig Collection which includes a list of biographies (and the date they appeared in the newspaper).

https://www.uleth.ca/lib/digitized_collections/ourheritage/index_page_stuff/Local_History_Links/local_history_index.html

Ancestry.ca may be accessed free of charge while onsite at the Lethbridge Public Library.

Find a Grave websites (sites are available for Mountain View, St. Patrick’s and Archmount Cemeteries in Lethbridge) are also useful for finding information on individuals and may include names of spouses and children, birth and death dates and additional information (sometimes obituaries).

11. Oral History, Interviews, Social Media

Sometimes the best way to enhance the story of a building is through oral history and interviews. It may be possible to track down people who owned, worked at, or lived in a building or house and get their stories and memories. Sometimes posting an interest in a building on social media will invite people to share stories of the place that are useful in creating a more well-rounded history of the site.
Contextual History

The second type of information that researchers require is Contextual History. This information gives the broader context – the historical, architectural, economic, social environment – for the property over the length of its existence. Contextual history allows researchers to understand how the building, its uses, its owners and changes to the building fit into the larger picture and into the society of the time it was built and used.

Secondary sources provide a great deal of valuable information at this point.

BOOKS
Several books have been written that include information related to built heritage in Lethbridge. These books may be accessed at the Lethbridge Public Library or Galt Archives or by contacting the Lethbridge Historical Society directly.

Lethbridge Historical Walking Tour
   This tour can be accessed on-line at: culture.alberta/ca/heritage/resourcemanagement/historicplacesstewardship/heritagesurvey/walkingdrivingtours.aspx

The Bend: A history of West Lethbridge
West Lethbridge History Book Society, 1982.
Useful for providing context and historical information for the development of west Lethbridge.

Lethbridge Place Names

Through the Looking Glass: Lethbridge 1867-1975

My Side of Town: Welcome to 13th Street North
Lethbridge Historical Society, 2005.
Provides information about people and buildings associated with 13th street north.

Where Was It? A guide to early Lethbridge buildings.
This book provides information on buildings that either no longer exist or which exist under a different name.

The Butcher, the Baker, The Candy Maker 1870-1920
Lethbridge Historical Society, 2005
Provides information on businesses in Lethbridge from 1870 to 1920 and is useful for understanding the function of a building as well as for developing a biography related to a person.

**AREA STRUCTURE PLANS and AREA REDEVELOPMENT PLANS**

Area structure plans and area redevelopment plans developed by the City of Lethbridge provide useful information related to neighbourhoods and communities. These may be obtained through the City of Lethbridge web-site.

**Area Structure Plans**

**Area Redevelopment Plans**
https://www.lethbridge.ca/Doing-Business/Planning-Development/Planning/Pages/Area-Redevelopment-Plans.aspx

Some buildings in the downtown have undergone renovation in the *Main Street Program*. Information on buildings under this program, as well as information related to the downtown, can be obtained from the office of the *Downtown Lethbridge BRZ*. Understanding the downtown and the growth of commerce provides context for many historic buildings.

309 - 6 Street South
Lethbridge, Alberta
Telephone: (403) 327-9002
Fax: (403) 380-3501
info@downtownlethbridge.com
All Lethbridge Historical Society newsletters as well as select publications can be accessed through the University of Lethbridge digitized collections page. These newsletters, published since the 1960s, provide research on a wide variety of material and may be useful for finding information related to buildings, building owners, and contextual information. Since the 1960s, the Lethbridge Historical Society has published over 50 books on Lethbridge and southern Alberta history.

Lethbridge Historical Society representatives sit on the Heritage Places Advisory Committee as well as the Heart of Our City Committee and work with various groups to promote the built heritage of Lethbridge and southern Alberta.

The Lethbridge Historical Society is also a chapter of the Historical Society of Alberta and may be able to direct researchers to other resources and/or groups within the province.
Historic Building Research Worksheet

Name of researcher: __________________________ Date ______________________
Address of building: _______________________________________________________
Previous Address of building (if appropriate) _____________________________________
Current use of building: _____________________________________________________
Historic use of building: _____________________________________________________
Current owner of building: ___________________________________________________
Historic name of building: ___________________________________________________
Year built: ___________________________
Source: __________________________________
Architect: ___________________________
Source: __________________________________
Builder: _______________________________
Source: __________________________________

Henderson Directory Search:

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Organizing Your Sources:

- Make copies of documents
- Note the source (publication or interviewee)
- Note the date of the publication or interview
- Transcribe notes or interviews while fresh in your memory
- Build a data file

Form adapted from Madison County Archival Library Historical Building Research worksheet