



# DOCUMENTING THE HISTORY OF BUILDINGS IN INDIAN RIVER COUNTY, FLORIDA

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## **IMPORTANT!**

When researching the history of Indian River County, do not forget to search records in three different counties:

Brevard County pre 1905

St. Lucie County from 1905 - 1925

Indian River County 1925 to present

### *Things you will need:*

- ✓ *Pencil and paper*
- ✓ *Land description*
- ✓ *Physical address*

Be sure to check the "Building Register" located in the Archive Center of Indian River County, (ACIRC) Main Library on the second floor. Ask for it at the desk. Do not waste your time researching if the work may already be done for you.

When starting your research there are two types of information that people search for: 1) **architectural facts**, such as date of construction, name of architect or builder, construction materials, and physical changes over time; and 2) **historical facts**, such as information on the original owner and other residents through time, or interesting events associated with the building or area. A house history may consist of either type of research, or be a combination of both.

## **Historic Architectural Styles found in Indian River County:**

- Frame Vernacular
- Masonry Vernacular
- Art Deco
- Craftsman
- Mission
- Mediterranean Revival
- Pueblo
- Monterey
- Prairie
- Neoclassical
- Minimal Traditional
- Contemporary
- Modern
- International
- Ranch
- Modern or Mid-Century Modern

See visual examples at: [Historic Architectural Styles](#) go to page 32.

## **GET TO KNOW YOUR HOME or BUILDING:**

The first place that anyone should start researching the history of a building is most likely within the walls of the building. You or the building's owner must own papers to show proof of ownership. Below are the items that you need to look for when starting out on your pursuit.



# 1 Personal Papers: deeds, title abstract, tax receipts, insurance records

- ✓ Abstract the complete land description, which includes township, range, and section. It may also require lot and block. Include the name of your subdivision and your street address.
  - ✓ Write down any of the known previous owner's name.
  - ✓ If you are unable to find any of the above information, go to the Indian River County Property Appraiser's web site at: <http://www.ircpa.org/> and search by owner's name, address or land description.
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# 2 Architectural design

Certain kinds of houses were built with specific construction techniques within a specific time. Is it contemporary or colonial? Is it a Spanish/Mediterranean bungalow or a pre-built house from Sears? Consult guides such as *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia & Lee McAlester or *Houses by Mail, A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company* by Katherine H. Stevenson. (For more resources, see the bibliography at the end of this guide.)

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# 3 Building Construction

- ✓ What year was your home built? You can find this in your deed records or online at the Indian River County Property Appraiser's web site mentioned above. HOWEVER, this date is often incorrect. Verify the year built of your home through more research.
  - ✓ Who were the architect and builder? This may also be in your personal papers. If not, further research at public record offices will be necessary.
  - ✓ What types of materials were used to build your house? Were there additions or significant renovations? This may be found in your papers or on online at the Indian River County Property Appraiser's web site mentioned above.
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# 4 History

- ✓ Are there neighbors who may have lived in the area long enough to be familiar with the history of the house or the area? They could tell you about the people who lived in the house. However, approach what you learn with a little bit of skepticism. Memories fade and the stories may not be exactly as it happened. Verification through newspapers, court records and interviewing more neighbors will help.
- ✓ When was the neighborhood developed? Who or what was it named after? Do the streets have any significant names or did they change their names? Further information can be found at the Archive Center of Indian River County vertical files. Check the [online library catalog](#).
- ✓ Was the house or any nearby buildings a business such as boarding house or hotel? Ask neighbors or check for historical information at the Archive Center vertical files, newspapers and courthouse records.
- ✓ Who are the owners? Where did they come from? What was their occupation? Did they live part time in the home? See how to research under "Check Occupants."

## **CHECK PUBLIC RECORDS:**

State, County and City governments are keepers of most records that may pertain to building records. The laws of each may differ and sometimes it may be necessary to check and verify where the records are located.

However, older records may be discarded or donated to another

repository such as a library or state archives. Access guides to Indian River County records which can be found at: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/ircbib.pdf> or search the online library catalog at: <http://www.irclibrary.org/>



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### **1** Official Records (Deeds)

The Clerk of Court is in charge of keeping track of who owns what property. Your goal is to trace the “chain” of ownership, starting with you and working backwards to the first owner. This is when the legal description is very important to have in front of you while searching.

- ✓ Search through microfilm records by name and date; book and page; or document type at the Indian River County Courthouse. There is a copy fee of \$1 per page. You can also search deeds online from October 1983 to the present at: <http://www.clerk.indian-river.org/recordssearch/ori.asp>
- ✓ In addition, the early deed indexes (Grantor and Grantee) from 1871 until 1956 are available at the Archive Center of Indian River County, Main Library. This includes Brevard (1871-1936), St. Lucie (1905-1953) and Indian River County (1925-1956 and 1990-2004). See library resources below.
- ✓ You may also own or have inherited the abstract of title. This important document traces the complete history of your property. There are some abstracts available in the Archive Center. Check their online catalog or visit the library for a complete list of abstracts.

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### **2** Building Permits

The Building Division (Community Development) of Indian River County may have copies of early building permits. (1801 27<sup>th</sup> Street, Bldg. A, Vero Beach, 32960)

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### **3** Tax records

Tax rolls are updated annually. Early tax records can provide owner's names and may even indicate a change or addition to the structure on the lot by a jump in the dollar amount of the tax. Most tax records are arranged by land description. The Archive Center owns the following tax books:

Tax Assessment Roll 1929 & 1939

Real Estate Revenue 1931

Tax Sale Record Book 1 1894-1926 & 1937

Tax Sale Record Book 2 1925-1932

## CHECK LIBRARY RECORDS:

The Archive Center of Indian River County, Main Library in downtown Vero Beach has been a repository for local historical collections since they moved into the building in 1991. Currently, the Archive Center on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor houses all local and Florida history. The goal of the Archive Center is to preserve and protect local historic materials. Most all items have been cataloged; therefore, you may search the [online catalog](#) for almost any subject. The catalog may also include a finding aid or a list of articles contained in each collection.



Through the efforts of staff and many volunteers, thousands of files and collections have been identified and created for public use. In addition, after the hurricanes of 2004, the Indian River County Historical Society donated their complete collection of documents to the library, which includes almost 6000 photographs. Other donations started arriving from local families who felt it was a good idea to share their Indian River County history with others who use the library.

Listed below are items that you can find in the Archive Center of Indian River County that may help you in your research.

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### **1** Land Records

As noted above, grantor and grantee indexes from 1871 until 1956 are available. The deed records on microfilm are available. Check the library catalog as well as guides to the collection for the years covered.

#### Brevard County

- Grantee and Grantor indexes 1871-1936
- Deed books 1871-1884 and 1884-1901 (LDS #2131642-2131652)

#### St. Lucie County

- Grantee and Grantor Indexes 1905-1953
- Deed books 1905-1927

#### Indian River County

- Grantee and Grantor Indexes 1925-1956
- Deed books 1925-1956 and 1990-2004

#### Homestead Land Patents 1872-1918

Armed Occupation Act of 1842-1849 – photocopies of original deeds and abstracts

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### **2** Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

Detailed maps of buildings within city limits were originally used for accessing fire insurance liability. They give details about the types of materials used in constructing buildings. They show street names, but rarely provide the name of the owners except on businesses. However, they show all buildings existing at a specific time.



For the city of Vero Beach, the Archive Center has 1923, 1926 on microfilm. On loan to the library is the 1929 original map book that shows corrections up to 1965.

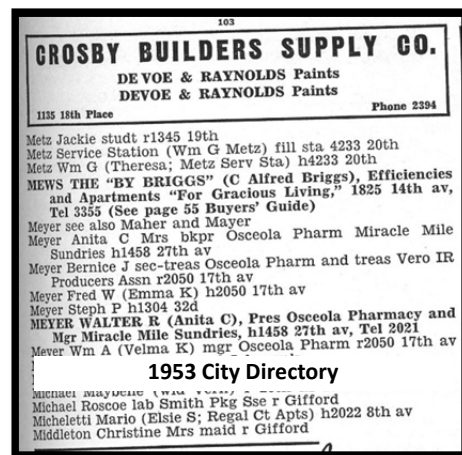
Read more about Sanborn maps at: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/snb-intr.html> or read *Fire insurance maps: their history and applications* by Diane L. Oswald.

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### 3 City Directories

The directories are arranged by person's names and by street addresses. They often provide a person's occupation and sometimes names of other people in the household. The listing by street address tells you who were living at an address (useful for rental property) and who are the neighbors.

- ✓ 1916, 1918 1925/26 - the Archive Center owns microfilm copies of directories from St. Lucie County that includes most towns in Indian River County.
- ✓ 1927/28 directory for the whole county
- ✓ 1928-1952 – Scattered years on microfilm for St. Lucie County directories, which include Indian River towns
- ✓ 1953, 1955-1956, 1958-1965, 1967-1978, 1980-Present - The directories only cover the city of Vero Beach except for 1998/99 which includes Sebastian.
- ✓ To view a complete listing of all city directories in the Archive Center collection, go to: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/citydirectory.pdf>
- ✓ Hill-Donnelly Cross Reference directory 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1988 – Present



Example of a City Directory

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### 4 County or family histories

At the Archive Center, there are hundreds of family files and collections specifically those families that settled prior to 1925 in Indian River County. In addition, there is a variety of local history books. They may contain information on the people who lived in the home or provide valuable facts about events, which shaped the history of the neighborhood.

- ✓ Search for local family names in the online catalog at: <http://catalog.irclibrary.org/polaris>. If you should find a hit, visit the library and ask to see the item that is located in the Archive Center on the 2nd floor. It may be found in a book, a vertical file or a manuscript collection. In addition, there are many oral histories of local pioneers in the Archive Center. Some tapes have been transcribed. There is equipment available for listening.
- ✓ Search an index to fourteen published histories for all areas of Indian River County at: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/irchistorybooks.pdf>.

## 5 Maps

For a complete listing of all maps in the collection of the Archive Center of Indian River County:  
<http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/floridamaps.pdf>

Most all aerial maps have been scanned and are available for your perusal in the Archive Center on the 2nd floor of the Main Library.

### Tract Books 1846-1945

- V. 1. Twp. 31S Rge. 38E Sec. 1-36
- V. 2. Twp. 31S Rge. 39E Sec. 1-36
- V. 3. Twp. 32S Rge. 39E Sec. 1-36
- V. 4. Twp. 32S Rge. 40E
- V. 5. Twp. 33S Rge. 39E Sec. 1-36
- V. 6. Twp. 34S Rge. 40E Sec. 1-36.

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## 6 Plat Books and Maps

When a new neighborhood is planned, the developer has to file a plat showing how the streets and lots will be laid out. This gives a base date for when the houses were built. The library has the following books:

- Brevard County Plat Book No. 1
- St. Lucie County Plat Book No. 2
- Indian River County Plat Book No. 3-5
- Indian River County Plat Book, 2005, 2002, 1978, 1977
- L. M. Merriman's original, hand-written plat book - ca. 1930
- Indian River Farms (Original) Plat Book 1

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## 7 Oral History Tapes, CD's and DVD's

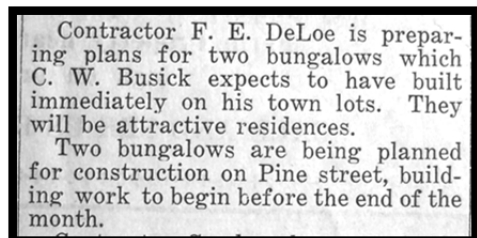
As stated in item #4 above, there are almost 200 video and DVD tapings of early pioneers who gave interviews about their life, family and homes in Indian River County. They may be found in the following collections: Marion Ball, Cracker Tales, Indian River Shores Historical Society, and WQCS Radio. Indexes and guides are available.

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## 8 Newspapers

Newspapers contain a wealth of information especially for the early years. You may find the exact month the house was built and details about the first owner.

Search local newspapers. Many have been digitized and are searchable on the computer located in the Archive Center.



Vero Beach Press Journal digitized for 1919-1972 and microfilm from 1919 to present

Fellsmere Farmer digitized 1912-1913  
Fellsmere Tribune digitized 1916, 1917-1921 (1914-1915 in hard copy)  
Florida Star 1880-1914 (Microfilm)  
Fort Pierce News 1906-1917 digitized and microfilm  
Fort Pierce News Tribune 1920-1925 digitized and microfilm  
Indian River News 1948-1966 (Microfiche)  
Indian River Farmer July 1913-Nov 1915 (Incomplete hard copy)  
Indian River Star Advocate Aug 1890-1925  
Mimeo News 1953-1956 (Wabasso) Indexed  
Sebastian Sun 1999-Present (Microfilm)  
Star Advocate 1890-1920 aka East Coast Advocate; Indian River Advocate; East Coast Chronicle; Indian River Chronicle (Microfilm)  
St Lucie County Tribune 1905-1919

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### Telephone Books

Arranged only by person's last name, they may help verify that a person was living at a given address in a certain year.

Indian River County – 1932, 1987– Present

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## 10

### Photographs and Postcards

There are almost 15,000 photographs and 3000 postcards located in the Archive Center. Many are of people and their homes. Unfortunately, the majority of the photographs are not identified, but they are organized into geographic areas such as Fellsmere or Vero Beach. Many have been scanned and indexed. Check the online catalog and finding aids.

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## 11

### Election Records

These records establish residency. Voters must live within Indian River County for a period of at least one year prior to an election. In addition, they had to be naturalized citizens. Often, you will find the date and place that they became naturalized citizens.

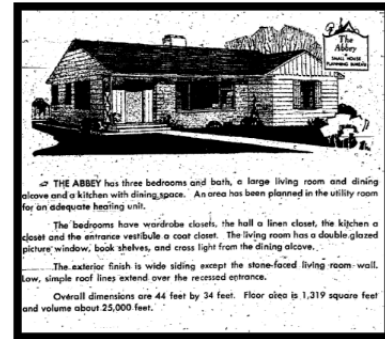
*Registered Voters of Indian River County, Florida 1925-1948* by Ramona Vickers

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## CHECK OCCUPANTS:

Researching the previous owners of your home will bring life to the history of your home.

- ✓ There are many records available to you and it involves researching their family history. You can find how to research by reading the "Beginner's Kit for Family History Research" which is online at the genealogy department's web site: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/>
- ✓ The first place to start is the library catalog. Research may have already been completed on the family. <http://catalog.irclibrary.org/polaris/>
- ✓ Check census records. The library has subscriptions to Ancestry.com and HeritageQuest. They include indexes and images of the entire census from 1790 to 1930. Most importantly, the 1935 and 1945 Florida State census is also available. These provide street addresses and you may find an owner.
- ✓ Check cemetery records. Completely indexed up to 1987 and published by the Indian River Genealogical Society called *Cemeteries of Indian River County Florida*.
- ✓ Check obituary index for previous owners. The index to all obituaries from 1919 to the present is on a database at the library that is fully searchable.



## CREATE A TIMELINE:

From all that you learned and gathered, put the information in chronological order. Type up a list starting with the date and name of the document and then describe what you learned. You can create a table in Microsoft Word or any word processing program. For example:

2424 Seminole Avenue, Vero Beach Timeline (Fictitious)

| Date      | Document Name  | Description  |
|-----------|----------------|--|
| 1932 May  | Warranty Deed  | Property was sold to John Smith and his wife from Columbus, OH                   |
| 1941 June | Tax Roll 1940  | Property owned by James Hill and paid \$14 in tax.                               |
| 1953      | City Directory | Bob Adams is now living at 2424 Seminole Avenue.                                 |
| 1972      | City Directory | Tom Clark is now living at 2424 Seminole Avenue and he works at the power plant. |

## OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- ✓ Probate or estate records
- ✓ Manuscripts (letters, diaries)
- ✓ Florida Master Site Files: <http://www.flheritage.com/preservation/sitefile/>
- ✓ Florida Master Site Survey Forms ([City of Vero Beach](#))
- ✓ Vital Records



- ✓ National Register of Historic Resources: <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/>
- ✓ County Commission Board Minutes for Brevard, St. Lucie and Indian River County

## **COMPLICATIONS:**

Street names and house numbers may have changed.

There may have been an earlier house on the lot that was torn down, moved or burned.

There may have been more than one building on the same lot.

## **APPLY FOR STATE OR NATIONAL HISTORICAL REGISTER:**

From the National Register of Historic Places at:

[http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/national\\_register\\_fundamentals.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/national_register_fundamentals.htm)

### **How are Properties Evaluated?**

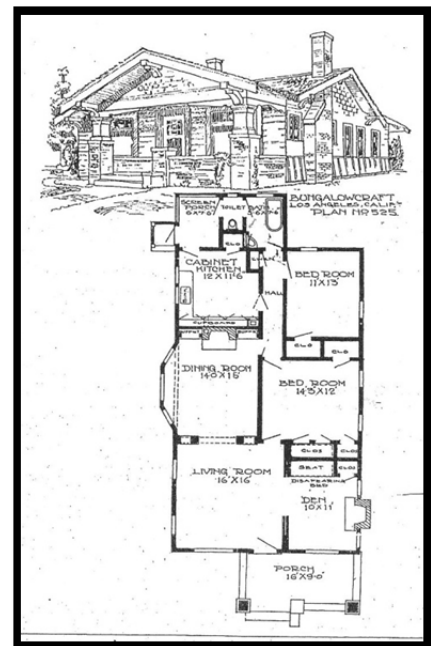
To be considered eligible, a property must meet the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. This involves examining the property's age, integrity, and significance.

- Age and Integrity. Is the property old enough to be considered historic (generally at least 50 years old) and does it still look much the way it did in the past?
- Significance. Is the property associated with events, activities, or developments that were important in the past? With the lives of people who were important in the past? With significant architectural history, landscape history, or engineering achievements? Does it have the potential to yield information through archeological investigation about our past?

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

(All items listed below are available in the Archive Center, Genealogy Department or Main Library's reference department.)

1. Blumenson, John J.G. *Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide for Styles and Terms, 1600-1945*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.
2. Florida Master Site File (Cultural Resources Report)
3. Green, Betsy. *Discovering the history of your house and your neighborhood*. Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2002.
4. *Historic Properties Survey of Indian River County*. St. Augustine, FL: Historic Property Associates, Inc., 1989
5. Howe, Barbara J. *Houses and Homes: Exploring their History*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1997.
6. Kyvig, David E and Myron A. Marty. *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1996



7. Light, Sally. *House Histories: A Guide to Tracing the Genealogy of your Home*. Spencertown, NY: Golden Hill Press, 1989.
  8. McAlester, Virginia & Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*
  9. Morgan, William. *The Abrams guide to American house styles*. New York: Abrams, 2008.
  10. Oswald, Diane L. *Fire Insurance Maps: Their History and Applications*. College Station, TX: Lacewing Press, 1997.
  11. Stevenson, Katherine H. *Houses by Mail, A Guide to houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company*
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## **WEB SITE RECAP**

1. Archive Center & Genealogy Department at the Indian River County Main Library: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/>
2. Beginner's Kit for Family History Research: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/kit.pdf>
3. Bibliography of Resources for Indian River County: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/ircbib.pdf>
4. City Directories: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/citydirectory.pdf>
5. Florida Master Site Files: <http://www.flheritage.com/preservation/sitefile/>
6. Historic Architectural Styles:
7. Histories of Indian River County area: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/irchistorybooks.pdf>
8. Indian River County Clerk of Court Official Records: <http://www.clerk.indian-river.org/recordssearch/ori.asp>
9. Indian River County Main Library: <http://www.irclibrary.org/>
10. Indian River County Main Library Catalog: <http://catalog.irclibrary.org/polaris/search/>
11. Indian River County Property Appraiser: <http://www.ircpa.org/>
12. Maps of Florida & Indian River County: <http://www.irclibrary.org/genealogy/floridamaps.pdf>
13. National Register of Historic Resources: <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/>
14. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/snb-intr.html>