

# Researching Residential History

By Kristi Mather, Leadership In Support of Neighborhood (LISN) Fellow, 2005-06

The following will help you in your search for more information on your Hamline Midway area property.

*I started research on my home last year, and found that many of the resources, and ways of obtaining information, had changed. Most likely, due to Internet accessibility and a limited storage capacity at our local institutions. I will try to keep this information as current as possible, but if you find any misinformation or broken links in the future, please let me know.*

*Each address or location researched is unique. Every step has a result that determines the next step, and the options available. It is sort of like a treasure hunt, where one clue leads to another and another and so on... Do not be discouraged, if very little or nothing shows up on your first try. Somewhere, somehow, someone has something about your house. It is just a matter of locating the source. If you have a lot of time and patience, you will find something you did not know about your house. Moreover, if you are lucky, you will uncover a plethora of history, just waiting to be uncovered.*

The following are resources used for home history research and what type of information is available at each resource.

## **Ramsey County Property Records and Revenue site (RR Info)**

<http://rrinfo.co.ramsey.mn.us>

All you need is an address in Ramsey County. This site shows tax and property characteristics of any property in Ramsey County. Including: taxpayer name and address, value information and history, structure description, (including year built), sale information, tax payments and history of payments, special assessments and other details. (If you have a subscription to this service, you can go into even more detail about the property and its occupants. Although when I last checked it was very expensive. At \$238.00/mos) If you don't have an Abstract of Title or Torrens available, this is a good site for that type of information.

## **City of Saint Paul website**

<http://www.stpaul.gov/maps>

At this site you can access all of the above information, as well as that of your neighbors, and your neighbor's neighbor. **Ramsey County Online Maps & Data.** Quite an extensive list of information is available here. Including, but not limited to: Legal description, property dimensions, current occupants, and legal owners, type of structure (with more detail about the structure itself), year built, and more. You can select as many properties as you want. It then displays all of the selected info, in a spreadsheet grid format that is somewhat cumbersome to read, although packed with information. Another key feature to this site is the aerial photographs of the area, which date back to 1940. **Note:** the website can be tricky to use, it took me a couple of tries before I got the hang of it. It also helps if you have a broadband connection.

### **Minnesota Historical Society (MN History Center)**

345 Kellogg Blvd Saint Paul, MN 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Library

<http://www.mnhs.org>

Here you will find a goldmine of information. If you can only get to one place, this would be the place to go. **Dual Cities Blue Book** is a directory that will list the occupants of your house for any given year. You then can in turn, use those names to check other sources, such as, newspapers, city directories, and census records. At the website, check the collections page. In addition, under Local History, the Building and House History, to see a list of available databases. The **Visual Resources Database**, which can be accessed online as well as on site, is a great source for photographs. The History Center also has wonderful atlases and plat maps. **Note:** When you visit the library, you will need to check in at the library desk with a driver's license or MN ID. Only pencils (no pens) and paper are allowed in with you and you will have to check any bags or purses in the lockers provided. You need quarters to lock them, but get the quarters back, when you return. Cameras **are** allowed. They also provide a copy service for a fee.

### **Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS)**

323 Landmark Center 75 West 5<sup>th</sup> Street Saint Paul, MN

Phone (651) 222-0701 or email [research@rchs.com](mailto:research@rchs.com)

<http://www.rchs.com>

This is the place to request your **Building Index Card/ Building Permit**. All you need is your address. **Contact them by phone or email**. Included on the permits are the original cost to build, builder and buyer names, start date and end date of construction, type of foundation, support and heating to be used, and other very detailed information, particular to the property.

Be aware that there is only one person who is retrieving these documents, and she does this on Thursdays only. The cost is \$13.00, but can increase depending on the complexity and amount of information available. For the majority, it is only the base cost. You can also have them check to see if your house is listed on the **Ramsey County Historic Site Survey**. This survey was completed in the early 1980s, and documents 5,000 existing historic structures located in Saint Paul and throughout the county. Each survey form describes a structure through an architectural profile and history, which also includes a black and white photo. **RCHS** also has many other publications, photographs, maps, and atlases you can use, but because of its limited space, you need to make an appointment to visit.

### **Saint Paul Public Library Central Library – Saint Paul Collection**

90 West Fourth Street Saint Paul, MN (651) 266-7000

<http://www.stpaul.lib.mn.us>

Check the library site for the online databases or general history and information about Saint Paul. They also have a photograph and map collection. Their hours are limited for research, but they have a very large collection of useful books.

*This is just a start for you to begin your home history research. After you get this basic information, names of builders and/or architects, permit numbers, etc., you can then go to other sources, such as the **Northwest Architectural Archives** (<http://special.lib.umn.edu/manuscripts/architect.html>).*

*Another way to find history on your house is to ask your neighbors what they remember about your house. Alternatively, just look around your house, inside and out! Basements and attics, behind walls and under flooring can hold multiple artifacts and clues to the past.*

**Kristi Mather**, LISN Fellow [email: mather007@comcast.net](mailto:mather007@comcast.net)