



Historic Wilmington Foundation Plaque Application

To be eligible for a Historic Wilmington Foundation Plaque, a building must be over 75 years old and be located in New Hanover County. Buildings over 50 years old at Wrightsville Beach, Carolina Beach and Kure Beach are also eligible for a plaque.

To apply for a plaque, complete the attached application in full. If certain facts are not available, give the reasons why. Please keep in mind that the information you gather is a permanent record on your building and will be available to historians and researchers for years to come. When completed, submit five copies of the application and supporting documentation with at least two photographs of your building to the Foundation office at 516 North Fourth Street.

Application Review Process

The Plaque Committee meets on the 2nd Wednesday of each month to review plaque applications. Applications must be submitted to the Foundation office at least one week prior to the meeting. The Committee reviews applications in the order they are received, and it is common for the process to take several months.

We also offer a plaque presentation ceremony when the plaque is completed.

The preservation option of a HWF easement/covenant for properties is available. Easements protect historic properties and secure them for future generations. Please call for details.

The Research

The application is designed to lead you step-by-step through your research. If the Committee needs more information, a member contacts you and explains what information you need to gather and present before the next meeting. If you choose, you can hire someone to do the research for you. Call 910.762.2511 for a list of researchers.

The Plaque Text

After the review process is complete, the Plaque Committee composes a text for your building. The Foundation will send a copy of the text to you, and you may then order your weather-resistant, hand-painted plaque.

The Price

The price of a new plaque is \$350 for members and \$400 for non-members (includes a one-year family membership to the HWF). Call for the cost of a replacement plaque. The price of the plaque must be paid in full before the information is sent to the sign company to be painted. Buildings over 100 years old receive a black plaque and those from 75 to 100 years old receive a maroon color plaque. Historic alleys over 75 years receive a green plaque. 50 year-old beach buildings receive a sea oats color plaque with black lettering. The Foundation will call you when the plaque is ready.

Committee Members

Beverly Tetterton, Chair
Kim Gordon
Ann Hewlett-Hutteman
Robert Hobson
Joan Howard

Janet Seapker
Curt Stiles
Elizabeth Macchainagh
Ed Turberg

Researching the history of your building is an exciting and rewarding learning experience, and the HWF plaque program provides a great way to document the history of your house. To help get you started, we've listed below the answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about our plaque program.

How do I know if a building is eligible for a Foundation plaque?

Buildings over 75 years old that are located in New Hanover County are eligible for a HWF plaque. Historic alleys over 75 years can be marked with a plaque. Properties over 50 years old at Wrightsville Beach, Carolina Beach and Kure Beach are also eligible for a plaque.

Who does the research for the plaque text?

Research is completed by the owner and submitted to the HWF plaque committee for review. The application is designed to lead you step-by-step in your research. If you prefer, we can put you in touch with someone who will research the information for you for a fee. When you complete the research, you submit it to the plaque committee for review. If the Committee needs more information, a member contacts you and explains what information you need to present before the next meeting.

Who decides on the wording of the plaque?

After the Committee approves the research, they compose a plaque text for the building. The Foundation sends you a copy of the approved text to review. If you have any questions or suggestions concerning the plaque text, the committee will work with you. When pleased with the final product, the applicant submits payment to the Foundation, and we proceed with ordering the hand-painted plaque.

How much does a plaque cost?

The price of a new plaque is \$350 for members of the Foundation and \$400 for non-members (fee includes a family membership to the HWF). This is the cost of the hand-painted plaque plus staff time.

How long does the process take?

The Plaque Committee meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month to review applications. Applications must be submitted to the Foundation office at least two weeks prior to the meeting. The Committee reviews applications in the order they are received, and it is common for the process to take several months.

How is the color of the plaque determined?

HWF plaques come in three different colors: black, brown and sea oats beige. Buildings over 100 years old receive a black plaque with white lettering. Those from 75 to 100 years old receive a maroon plaque. Buildings 50 years or older at the beaches receive a sea oats color plaque with black lettering. Historic alley plaques are green.

If my plaque is weathered and old, can I get a new one?

If your plaque has seen better days, we can arrange to have it repainted. If you choose to have your plaque repainted, the Committee uses this opportunity to review the original research and update the plaque text if appropriate.

What happens to the researched information after my plaque is approved?

The information you gather is a permanent record on your building and will be available to historians and researchers for years to come. The application and all additional information generated by your research will be filed permanently at the Foundation. A copy is also kept in the Local History Room of the New Hanover County Library, which is open seven days a week, and on weekends.

Instructions for Completing the Summary Worksheet

Much of the information requested on the worksheet will appear on the plaque. It is important that dates and names are accurate. The source of all information must be recorded in the space provided on the worksheet. Examples of documentation are shown on the following page.

1. Address of house, block and lot numbers are stated after applicant's name and address. If the house or building has been moved from another site, the former location should be noted as well.
2. The building will be named when possible for the original owner or resident. Other owners or residents may be added if they occupied the building for 40% of its life, if they made significant architectural changes to the building, or if they are deemed to have been more important to the history of the city.

The Plaque Committee assigns the name on the plaque based on the information presented. The name and the following information provide the house or building with personality and make for a meaningful plaque.

3. Dates of ownership by the first and/ or other significant owners are included on the plaque.
4. Name of owner(s) and spouse must be researched with care and stated in full. Record source of information.
5. Birth and death dates of owner(s) and wife are to be stated. Marriage date is not required but may elucidate the history of the house. Place of birth is generally included on plaque if other than Wilmington.
6. Occupation of owner appears on the plaque and contributes to the social history of the community.
7. An exact date of construction is sometimes difficult to determine and the committee may have to assign a circa date. See the attached checklist and resource list for help.
8. If the name of the architect, builder or contractor is known, this information will be included on the plaque.
9. Major architectural changes to the building are important. Record these dates as accurately as possible.
10. The architectural style of the building is determined by the Plaque Committee.
11. **Please include two current color photographs of the exterior of the house with your application. Digital images are preferred and can be emailed to staff.**

SUMMARY WORKSHEET

Date _____

(Please type or print clearly)

Applicant's Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Address of House: _____

Block No. _____

Lot No. _____

RESEARCH INFORMATION

ORIGINAL OWNER

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Full name: _____

Birth date: _____

Place of birth: _____

Death date: _____

Occupation of owner: _____

Name of wife: _____

Birth date: _____

Place of birth: _____

Marriage date: _____

Death date: _____

Date of construction: _____

Architect/ Builder (please include if known):

Dates of ownership: _____

SUMMARY WORKSHEET – PAGE 2

Dates of major architectural changes to exterior:

_____	_____
_____	_____

Other pertinent or interesting information about the house, its owners, or residents:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

OTHER SIGNIFICANT OWNERS (SEE NO. 2)

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Full name: _____

Birth date: _____

Place of birth: _____

Death date: _____

Occupation of owner: _____

Name of wife: _____

Birth date: _____

Place of birth: _____

Marriage date: _____

Death date: _____

Other pertinent or interesting information about the house, its owners, or residents:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Checklist of Sources for Plaque Research

The staff of the North Carolina Room at the Library can help you locate the sources listed on the checklist. All documents used to establish information requested should be copied and attached to the application. For example, deeds, death certificates, cemetery records, census records, pages from city directories, maps and others. The application and all additional information generated by your research will be permanently deposited at the Historic Wilmington Foundation. A copy is kept in the local history room of the New Hanover County Public Library.

Deed Books (Register of Deeds Office):

A title search of your property is imperative and must be done before any other research. Begin with yourself. You know how you obtained the property. You are the grantee. The party who sold you the house is the grantor. To find out who they bought it from, check the grantee index at the Register of Deeds office under their name. The index will give you the name of the party who sold them the property. Continue to check the grantor and grantee indices as you trace the property back as far as possible. The grantor/grantee indices give the book and page number of the deed book where the transaction was recorded. Look the deed book and read the legal description of the property to make sure that you are searching the correct deed. In town, lots were often divided, or one person owned more than one lot. In rural areas, large tracts of land were broken into smaller ones for sale. The legal description on the actual deed will let you know that you are searching the correct piece of property. If you get confused, take the time to sketch the lot and those that surround it in chronological sequence. Copies of all deeds that prove something, i. e. the construction of the building, must be submitted along with application. As you trace the property backward you should record the following facts: name of grantor, name of grantee, date of transfer, block and lot no. if in town (number of acres if in rural areas), deed record book and page number, and sum if given. For example:

Patent to Isaac Jacobs; August 22, 1808; 33 Acres including Block 197, Lots 1 and 2, Deed Book O, page 305.

Jacob Wessell to Owen Burns; August 23, 1853; Block 197, Lots 1 and 2, Deed Book KK, page 576, \$600.
Owen Burns to Oscar Parsley, et al; December 8, 1857, Block 197, Lots 1 and 2, Deed Book OO, page 474 and PP page 28 and 34, \$3269.00

Oscar G. Parsley to Richard H. Gant; April 27, 1858; Block 197, Lots 1 and 2, Deed Book PP, page 405. \$2100.

etc. to present owner . . .

Wright Chemical Corporation to Suzanne Betty Hobbs Stanley; July 10, 1987; Block 197, Lot 1, Record Book 1383, page 163.

Now that you have gathered names, dates, property descriptions and sums of money, you are ready to proceed with the rest of the research. There are a few pitfalls of deed research to be aware of:

1. Deeds trace property, not houses. You may trace the property back to the founding of Wilmington, but it does not mean that a house was there. Often the legal terms, tenements and hereditaments thereon, can be found in the deed. This only means that if there are buildings on the property they are included in the transaction. It does not mean that buildings are definitely there.
2. You may have a long list of property owners, but that does not mean that they lived on the property. Many houses were built as rental property.
3. Some people owned so much property that they take up many pages in the grantor/grantee indices. Sometimes you run into trustees' names, usually lawyers, who handled the property for many clients. It is difficult to discern which property is yours. If the date or lot number is given in the index it will help you narrow down which deed is yours, but often they are not listed in the index.
4. Old deeds are usually handwritten and difficult to read. Prior to 1868, North Carolina practiced English common law, which is quite different from our current code system. Do not try to transfer common law terms and practices into current ones. A copy of Black's Law Dictionary will help you understand the legal terms.
5. Property is often inherited. Estate settlement can take years to resolve. Wills and estate papers can be helpful to untangle the divisions and changes in ownership.

❑ **Block Books (Register of Deeds Office):**

Block Books are large books that indicate the owners in each block. They vary in dates and unfortunately some are not dated at all. Law firms, especially older ones, often have their own block books. A good example is the McKoy block books at the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society.

❑ **Gray's Map and Sanborn Insurance Maps (Library):**

Maps that show houses are rare. There are, however, two excellent sources for Wilmington (most large cities will have the same). They are the Gray's Map, 1882, which came out of Gray's Atlas of Cities, and the Sanborn Insurance Maps. There are two Gray's Maps. One covers the central business district of Wilmington and the other those blocks surrounding it. The maps show lots, shape of buildings and position on the lot. The Sanborn Company of New York, recorded each house in major cities for insurance purposes. For Wilmington, maps exist for 1889, 1893, 1898, 1904, 1910, 1915, and supplements that cover 1921, 1928, 1948, and 1955. For the later years, check each page to see the date in the upper right hand corner. Each building is drawn to proportion and situated in proportion as to how it sat on the lot. Porches, windows, building materials and other architectural features are visible on the maps. The Sanborn maps are a great source for narrowing down when your house was built. For example, if your house does not appear on the 1898 map, but shows up on the 1904 map, you have narrowed down the construction date to between those years.

❑ **City Directories 1861 to present (Library):**

Being the largest city in NC for over 100 years, we are blessed with numerous city directories for Wilmington. They include the following years: 1861, 1865, 1867 (two directories), 1871, 1875, 1877, 1881, 1883, 1889, 1895, 1897, 1900-present day. If your house shows up in one but not in the previous one, you have narrowed down the date of construction. The city directories are also our best resource for occupation of the inhabitant(s). Following a person through the directories gives insight into their careers. They changed jobs as often as we do today. The Plaque Committee requires a complete list of the occupants of the house and prefers to use the occupation of the first owner at the time the house was constructed. This information should be recorded carefully. For example:

1905-06: not listed	1919-20: not listed
1907-08: E.P. Laird, civil engineer	1922: Ludwig Leiner, clerk US Engineer's Office
1909-10: Jake Solomon	1924: Ludwig Leiner, inspector US Engineer's Office
1911-12: no street index	1926: Ludwig Leiner, inspector US Engineer's Office
1913-14: no street index	1928: Ludwig Leiner, (Katie)
1915-16: Henry L. Taylor, salesman	1932-52: Ludwig Leiner, (Katie)
1917-18: John A. Ryan, Supt. Wilmington Marine Railway	1953-69: Ludwig Leiner, (Katie)

As valuable as they are, city directories have the following pitfalls:

1. Directories before 1883 do not list street addresses. They describe the location as, Ann between Second and Third, or Fifth between Dock and Ann. These descriptions indicate that a house was on this block, but it may not be your house. You may have to trace all other houses on the block to eliminate any other possibilities.
2. Street indices do not appear until 1915. This is where names become very valuable. If you know who owned the property, you can check the directory by name. If the property was rental, a check of property owners will not show up at that address. The only option is to go through the directory, page by page, looking for your address. An index of street address for the 1883 city directory has been prepared. It is an invaluable tool.
3. Remember that the city directories are prepared about one year before they are printed. This may prove an earlier date for your house.
4. Women and children are often not listed in the early directories unless they are the sole inhabitants of the house. By the early 20th century, children are often listed if they are older and living at home.
5. Sometimes, particularly in the older directories, people are listed as living in a boarding house or hotel with no address given.

Tax Records (Library):

Tax lists for New Hanover County have survived for various years. Many have been abstracted and are available in book form at the Library. Others are on microfilm. They list owners, property and the amount of taxes paid on a piece of property. One can speculate if there was a building on the property depending on the amount of taxes paid. When checking the tax lists in the City of Wilmington, notice that the acreage given is not the number of acres owned in town, but the lot number. In earlier tax lists, the printed forms that were used specified acreage and it seems that the tax accessor used that space for the lot number.

Insurance Policies 1846-1857 (Library):

Insurance policies were sometimes filed in the deed books. They are not listed in the grantor/grantee index so look out for them while reading the deeds. Numerous insurance policies were found in the deed books from 1846-1857. They have been abstracted and placed into book form for easy use and can be found at the Library. They list the property owner, the location of the house on the property, the description of the house and how old the building is at the time. They often list the neighbors' houses as well.

Schenck Diary (Library):

The Schenck Diary, kept by Nicholas W. Schenck (1830-1913), is an invaluable resource for Wilmington research. He recorded in his diary the many buildings and owners he remembered from his youth and often traces the building from one owner to the next, giving interesting tidbits about the owners. His diary includes hand drawn maps of blocks and locations of buildings. His work is concentrated in the central business district of Wilmington. Although he recorded his memoirs around 1905, his thoughts are of people, places and events as far back as 1838. A group of dedicated historians have, over the years, transcribed much of the Schenck Diary.

Photographs (Library, Cape Fear Museum, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society):

Photographs or line drawings of your building are exciting if you can find them.

Cemetery Records (Library):

Now that you have learned about the construction of the building it is time to focus on the owners of the structure. Houses are built for people and it is the inhabitants that make the buildings come alive. Cemetery records give you the birth and death dated of the people who inhabited your house. There are many abstracts at the Library including: Oakdale Cemetery (Wilmington's largest), Bellevue Cemetery, Pine Forest Cemetery, Oak Grove Cemetery, and various smaller church and family cemeteries. Sometimes the people you are researching moved and out-of-town research must be conducted.

Newspapers and Newspaper Obituaries (Library):

Newspapers are a great source of information about houses and people. In the 1880s and 1890s, newspapers listed building permits. Often when a new house was built, a write up about the architect and a description of the building appeared in the newspaper. Unfortunately, there are few complete indices for newspapers and it is a matter of searching through each page near the date that your research has led you to believe your house was built. Newspapers also list funerals that were held in the home, deaths occurring in the home or visits from friends and relatives. The [Reaves Collection](#), consisting of family research, contains much of this type of information. Newspaper Obituaries are also very helpful. They give birth and death information, military service, occupation, civic work, fraternal club memberships, religious affiliation and family members. If they are immigrants from another county, state or country, this information can often be found in the obituary. If a person leaves Wilmington after living here many years, their obituary will appear in the local newspaper and will tell of their life in Wilmington and the area to which they relocated.

Birth, Death and Marriage Certificates (Register of Deeds Office):

North Carolina did not officially record births and deaths until 1913. If your occupant dies after that date their death certificates can be very helpful. Place of birth, name of spouse and cause of death are given. Marriage Certificates are much older, some dating back to the 1700s. The Plaque Committee requires information about the husband and wife if they were joint owners. If they were married more than one time, the spouse that lives in the house is the only one included on the plaque. Marriage records assist in tracking down information about the spouse.

Social Security Death Index (Library)

Wills (Clerk of Superior Court)

Church Records (Library):

Church records are helpful in determining the birth and death dates of residents. The Library has a large selection of church records on microfilm and in book abstracts.

Family Histories (Library and Lower Cape Fear Historical Society):

Family histories provide the genealogy of many families in our area and are found in family files or books. Many families moved to and from Wilmington from the surrounding areas and these family histories can be of great assistance in locating them.

Census Records (Library):

Census records give birth dates and occupations of residents and can often be helpful in finding construction dates. The census was taken in the city block by block. The enumerators visited each house in the block and then went on to the next block. The later censuses, 1900-1920, actually list streets by name. The earlier censuses can be used by double checking the residents listed in the city directories. This may not be conclusive proof, but it provides a terrific clue for hard to research houses.

Latter Day Saints Ancestors Files (Library)

Local History Books (Library):

Local history books can tell you much about the residents and the time and place in which they lived. Many families who built houses lived in the community for generations. They had businesses, served as civic and church leaders, were members of clubs and left their mark on the community. If you get a clue from an obituary or other source, follow up on that lead in a local history book. There are also many good books on historic architecture in Wilmington and in general. Consult the architecture books to better understand the style of the house. Understanding the architecture of your house can easily make your search more interesting and give insight into the residents.

Descendants and Neighbors:

Many families who built these houses have lived here a long time. Seek out their descendants. They may have photographs of the house or of the people who lived there. They may be able to tell you stories about the residents or give you clues as to where to look next. Often neighbors have lived in nearby houses for generations. Talk to them about the former residents they can remember, or if they can remember if the house was altered in any way over the years.

Former Plaque Applications (Library, Historic Wilmington Foundation):

Plaque applications can tie into your research. These former plaque applications may relate to your house or residents, and the research has already been done for you.

Professionals:

Architectural historians may be needed to inspect your house for signs of historic fabric and detail.

Putting It All Together

A historical chronology of the building and owner can be very helpful when doing research. Although not required, it is suggested that a chronology be included with your application. Once you have gathered all of the information possible and made copies of all important deeds, city directory pages, obituaries, marriage certificates, cemetery information, tax lists, maps, pages from local history books, etc., you need to construct a history of the house. To do so, record each piece of information that you have gathered chronologically. By listing each event concerning the house and its occupants, you can discern when the house was built, who built it and what they did for a living. As you look through the chronology, you can tell a great deal about the social fabric of this one piece of property, the neighborhood and the city.

Please include two current color photographs of the exterior of the house with your application. Digital images are preferred and can be emailed to staff.

**Plaques can be presented in a ceremony attended by the Plaque Committee.
Please ask staff for details.**