

How-To Guide: Researching Home History at The Filson

By Jordan Sangmeister | December 11th, 2013 | Research Tools | No Comments

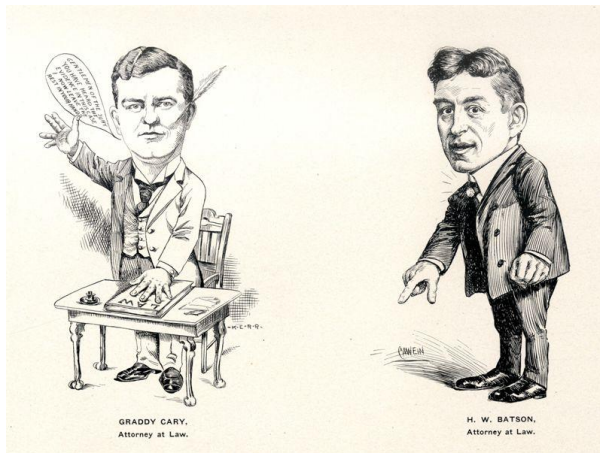


Image of Homer Batson (right) and his law partner, Grady Cary, from "Kentuckians As We See Them," Louisville: G.G. Fetter, 1905, page 195. Batson was another resident of 422 West Oak in 1905.

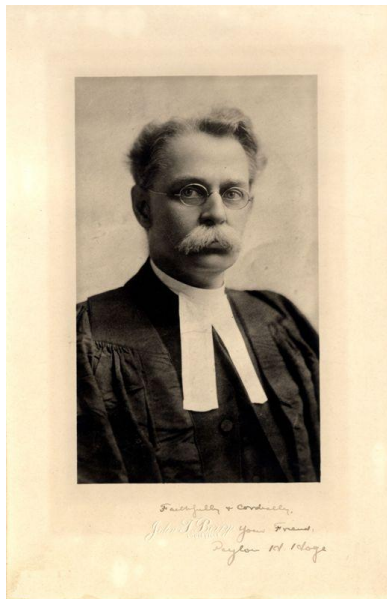
By Jordan Sangmeister

Frequently I hear members of our community curious about the history of their old home. The Filson is a fantastic resource for doing such research. With so many historic homes and buildings in Louisville I embarked on a crash course to writing a how-to guide for all home history hunters.

My first step was choosing what property to research. Currently 422 West Oak is home to The Rudyard Kipling and I know that the history of the building would be appreciated by its patrons and owners. There wasn't much information on the building provided, however I knew that it had been a private residence. My goal was to get a complete listing of previous residents and find historic photographs of the building.

At The Filson we have the ability to search City Directories dating back to 1830 on Microfilm. The City Directories are generally divided into three sections. The first is a listing of resident names and their occupation, the second section is a listing of addresses and their residents, and the third section is business listings.

Since I didn't know what year the building had been built I began my search with the year 1910. **In 1910 many addresses in Louisville were changed to their current numbers.** I was excited to find the address and the current resident was Reverend William W. Landrum. In order to find out more information on Reverend Landrum I found his name in the first section of the same City Directory and discovered that he worked at Broadway Baptist Church.



Rev. Peyton H. Hoge, minister at Warren Memorial Presbyterian Church and resident of 422 West Oak in 1904 and 1906 (Filson Photograph Collection).

Now came the tricky part, in order to find any previous information on 422 West Oak I would have to figure out what the address had previously been. I copied down all addresses and resident names from the 400-block of West Oak before removing the 1910 City Directory from the microfilm reader. I loaded the 1909 City Directory hoping to find the Reverend Landrum's name as a resident on the 400-block. Unfortunately he was not listed, however there was one address that

simply stated *Vacant*. After cross-referencing the list of 1909 and 1910 residents I discovered what each house number had been changed to. 422 West Oak had previously been 414 West Oak which was the vacant property.

Once my research had overcome the hurdle of finding the original house number things sped up a bit. I worked back in time loading each year's City Directory and checking the listed resident. If a different resident was listed I would look up their occupation and any other information that was provided in the first section of the directory.

My research into the past took me to 1882. Since my research concluded, I have learned that is when a large addition doubling the size of the home was added. **After researching that far into the past, I decided that my chances of finding photographs of the building would be more likely if I went back and researched 1910 to the present day.**

This time I was researching into the present and it was amazing to watch how fast the directories grew and even turned into double rolls of microfilm. I continued to take the information from each year of residents and their occupation. The hunt concluded once I finally found the current owners listed in the City Directory in 1985.



Garden behind Bodley home at 422 West Oak. From the Bodley Family Photo Collection, FHS.

To satisfy my goal, I wanted to find historic photographs of the building. Using The Filson's Photo Database I plugged in all residents names and their businesses. I was amazed at how easy it was to find several of the past residents photographs! One large collection in particular, the Bodley Family Collection, was very helpful. The Bodley Family lived at 422 West Oak from 1917-1941 and they loved to take photographs of their garden. With the help of Special Collections, I was able to sort through these photographs and dive into the history of the home.

Although my research is not complete yet, I hope that this how-to guide can help those looking for home history at The Filson. The staff is open to answer any question and show you how to use the tools that we have here.

When It All Comes Together

By Jennie Cole | February 6th, 2013 | [Browsing The Collections, Research Tools](#) | [1 Comment](#)

We have a lot of fantastic information resources in this town. Never was this more apparent to me than during a recent research endeavor done for personal purposes. I had been lucky enough to be invited over to a friend's home in Old Louisville for a dinner party. During the course of the evening, the inevitable "when was this house built, who built it?" questions came up – as my friends did not have a firm idea, I decided what better thank you could I give them for an evening of fun than to research a bit of the history of their home?

Although I've had numerous patrons address me for assistance when working reference on researching their homes' histories, I had never personally conducted such a search in depth. I decided to begin with Louisville City Directories. After an embarrassing stint during which I spent some time researching the wrong house number, I was able to find some solid information on an owner in the early 1900s – what was especially valuable was that I found information on when the house numbers on the street changed (1909). The Louisville City Directories are available here at The Filson on microfilm as well as in hard copy and digitally for certain years. From the name given in the city directories, I turned to The Filson's library subscription to Ancestry.com and researched the available records for the family. I found census records, death certificates, foreign travel information, and more. [The City Directories, as well as Ancestry.com access, are also available through [the Louisville Free Public Library.](#)]

Another resource I turned to, as I was struggling to determine if this family was indeed the original owner, was the [Louisville Free Public Library's](#) access to the [ProQuest Database of the Louisville Courier-Journal newspaper](#). I've been incredibly excited about this tool since it was announced late last year, and it has been proving invaluable in local history research. I found some very interesting articles on the family's local involvement and foreign travel, which I passed on to my friends, the current owners of the house. When they shared it on Facebook, a friend of theirs suggested they check out the [Digital Collections at the University of Louisville](#) to see pictures of one of the family members. I love [crowdsourcing](#)! After reviewing the pictures and being in contact with the archivist in charge of that particular collection, we were able to provide one another with additional material on the individuals. The Digital Collection also contains a selection of U of L's [dissertations and theses](#). One on local women's clubs of the

early twentieth century gave me some more information on the lady of the house, as did a [Google Books](#) search of her name. It's amazing what sorts of minute books and legal proceedings have been published and fully digitized online!

I'm still not exactly sure about the date of the home's construction; I am hoping to perhaps spend some time at the [Metro Government's Deed Room](#) to trace the original deeds to the house through a title search. I also would like to learn more about the builders or architect of the home. And of course, I need to learn more about the gap leading up to my friends' purchase. I am not an expert on this topic in any way, but I do feel like this little bit of time spent has really opened up a lot of avenues to pursue. It's also reminded me of just a few of the great information sources in town aside from the Filson – the [LFPL](#) and [U of L's Archives and Special Collections](#) – and my amazing colleagues who work there.

Finding Your Way Home: Archivist Explores the History of 205 S. Peterson Avenue

By Johna Ebling | June 2nd, 2015 | Browsing The Collections, Research Tools, Then And Now, Uncategorized | No Comments



This past March I attended **Steve Wiser**'s lecture titled "Historic Homes of Frankfort Avenue" at the **Peterson Dumesnil** home. As a resident of the Clifton neighborhood I was excited to learn more about the homes located on—and around—a street I travel daily. As expected, Wiser's talk was interesting and full of wonderful images and information (if you have yet to attend one of his lectures, I recommend you do!).

Walking home at the end of the event, my fiancé and I stopped to admire one of the residences mentioned in Wiser's lecture—205 S. Peterson Avenue. As we paused and chatted out front, the owners of said home (who had also attended the lecture) began talking with us. Before long we were invited into their home for a tour. As we were guided around, the couple inquired about my line of work and when I told them that I worked at The Filson, they asked if I couldn't conduct a bit of research about their home, which of course I was happy to oblige. Read on to find out what I discovered.



Wedding photograph of Lilian M. Stitzel and Frank B. Russell; 17 August 1895.
[SB R963_004]

With great regularity we have researchers visit us with queries about their home. Often it's in hopes that we have pictures of their home or information on previous residents; typically these researchers come equipped with a street address and house number. Unfortunately, in this scenario those clues are not the most useful pieces of information. If not an address, what *is* useful you ask? Names and dates. If you can provide a surname of someone who lived in the house, as well as a span of dates when they lived there, we are in a much better position to assist.

Supplied with the surname 'Russell' along with an address, I was in a good position to get started. Typically one of my first stops in residential and genealogical research is the **Louisville Free Public Library's newspaper database**, specifically the records from the *Courier-Journal Historical (1830-1922)*. From that database I gathered information on the home and its owners, Frank B. and Lilian (Stitzel) Russell.



Joyce Russell on a tricycle, 1911. [SB R963_009]

With names in hand I visited Ancestry.com (The Filson has a subscription for both staff and researcher use) and learned more about the family and its extensions. I am going to pause for a moment to out myself and my glaring mistake: I didn't look at our own card catalog first—or even second (yikes!). Had I done so I would have realized that we have, in our own stacks, two manuscript collections from the Russell Family:

- Frank B. Russell Scrapbook, 1870-1911 (Mss. SB R963)
- Frank B. Russell Papers, 1849-1958 (Mss. A R963)

Since the discovery of these collections was rather exciting, I didn't let myself linger too long on my sophomoric mistake (but hey, I've worked here less than a year, so I suppose a "2nd year mistake" is permissible—at least the first time around...)

Full of photographs and mementos documenting the lives of the Russell family during the early 20th century, the scrapbook was a particularly great find.



Below the Falls of the Niagara, September 1911. Pictured: Frank Russell (FBR), Tox, Lilian, Joyce, Hobart, Kent, JBH, N, Le. [SB R963_011]

Captured within are images of the couple's travel, including but not limited to: Coney Island, 1899; Cuba, 1905; and duck hunting in Florida, 1904. Family life is also depicted through images of children playing in the yard, family posed with their vehicles as well as horses, and the family's domestic staff.

Telegraphs relay congratulations of the couple's 1895 nuptials, which is documented through a photograph as well as the formal invitation. Clues of the Russell's roots in Clay City, KY are evidenced through photographs and correspondence within the scrapbook as well the Russell Papers (Mss. A R963), which mainly document Frank's interest and involvement in the Kentucky iron industry.

This scrapbook is just one of the many held here at The Filson and is a prime example of the sort of candid insight that can be gleaned from their contents.

Interested in seeing more images of the Russell Family? Stay tuned for an upcoming gallery featuring the family, their home, and travels. In the meantime, be sure to check out our current [image gallery collection](#).

Image: [SB R963_014] Five images of Hobart Russell in various poses.