

Homeowner Handbook:

How to Research the History of a House in Berkeley: An Architectural and Social History Guide

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Introduction

One of the things that drew you to your house and to your neighborhood (or your wished-for house and neighborhood if you are not yet a homeowner but aspire to be) is architectural character. Learning about the ingredients of that character will help you understand it, value it, preserve it, and pass it on intact to others. The built environment of Berkeley is a successful, collaborative, long-term design project, the result of generations of inventiveness and repurposing inspired by a sense of community and consensus as well as by raw economic and social forces. Learning how to read the buildings and neighborhoods of Berkeley will enrich your daily experience and help you understand the streetscapes of other U. S. towns and cities as well.



Shingle Style with Clinker Brick Chimney, Parker Street, ca. 1890

The City of Berkeley General Plan Urban Design and Preservation Element endorses policies and actions that “protect its existing built environment and cultural heritage,” specifically its “livable real neighborhoods, and cherished older buildings, all of which contribute to its sense of place and give it a dimension of visual richness and social and economic diversity. . . . Berkeley is a highly visible example of a built environment that ‘works.’” To that end the city’s Landmarks Preservation Ordinance of 1974 prescribes the identification and preservation of elements in the built environment of architectural, cultural, and historic interest or value. Even if we do not actually become involved in “landmarking,” it is a matter of considerable satisfaction, as

members of the Berkeley public, to learn about, appreciate, and contribute to this larger common enterprise. The streetscapes of Berkeley are open to the public and we all intuit how they create a sense of place. The ingredients include light, scale, plantings, as well as buildings, working together. Walking Berkeley's streets, note where daily life seems to flourish and also note the places humans avoid—this difference is a matter of design and the result of active decision making in the past as well as raw economic forces. Valuing the socially beneficial and the aesthetically successful ingredients in our built environment contributes to an enriched life for us and our successors.



Bungalows, Derby Street, ca. 1915

Before making substantial changes to an old house, identifying its type and learning about it as a specific structure is advisable. It is also rewarding to learn about the architectural and social history of your property and your predecessors in owning and stewarding it. And, of course, it is helpful, if changes are envisioned, to learn what the experts know to assist in your planning and in helping you retain or increase the value of the property.

This document outlines two facets of research into houses: architectural and social. Both are important, both are full of interest. While this research is rewarding for anyone looking into almost any house built before 1975, it is particularly rewarding for architecturally unusual and ambitious houses, houses formerly inhabited by well-known figures, or houses characteristic of a significant cultural moment. For these notable structures there are agencies with which you may want to register such a home, making it possibly eligible for some important financial incentives to restore and maintain it: the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historic Resources, and the local Landmark Commission. In the past and in National Register formal parlance, for a house to be eligible for their listing it had to be a masterwork of an important architect, or it needed to be associated with a notable occupant. Current thinking goes beyond these criteria, placing emphasis as well on characteristic house types associated with larger social patterns of settlement and occupation.¹

¹ see James Michael Buckley, "People in Place: Local Planning to Preserve Diverse Cultures," *The Oxford Handbook of Public Heritage Theory and Practice*, Edited by Angela M. Labrador and Neil Asher Silberman, 2018.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190676315.013.6>

The first step in achieving a successful account of your house—whether an ‘ordinary’ house or a house with regional or national significance—is doing excellent, thorough, well documented research. “Well-documented” means that every factoid you find should be associated with a footnote indicating your precise source, sufficiently detailed to enable you or another reader of your document to go easily and quickly to that source and find the basis for your statement.

Tip: your most important source of information is the house itself; and the most important piece of information about the house in doing research is the street address but note that in some cases, street names and house numbers have been changed. Historical maps will let you know if that is the case with your house and help you date that change as maps are almost always dated.

There are three general areas of research that you can pursue to understand your house’s history: its design and construction, its owners and inhabitants, and the context that will provide the basis for understanding its significance.



Midcentury Modern, Eunice Street, Roger Lun Yuen Lee, architect, 1956

Berkeley Context

For thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans on San Francisco Bay, Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone people lived in what is now Berkeley. To date, archeological investigations have been concentrated on proposed development sites owned by commercial interests or public entities. Most residential areas have not been explored; if you excavate on your property, be alert to the possibility of Native American material culture in the soil.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Berkeley developed in three distinct spatial zones. First, the Bayside town of Ocean View—with a shipping pier from the 1850s and, after 1879, national railroad access—developed a wide variety of small industries (eventually more than 100 factories) and housing for workers and managers.

Second, in 1873, the state university was established in the foothills of the Coastal Range, and the Union Pacific (later Southern Pacific) Railroad ran a spur up to the university entrance establishing a depot at what would become the city's downtown. Here housing and retail establishments grew rapidly to accommodate the university and business communities and, because light rail and ferry transportation systems developed so well so fast, also accommodating those who worked in San Francisco as well as locally. Last, the pastureland and orchards that filled the acreage between these two urbanizing centers was developed early in the twentieth century, as tightly-knit blocks of housing. Refugees from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, job-seekers responsive to booming wartime shipbuilding industries in the 1940s, and GI-bill students in the 1950s coming to an institution with few dormitories successively put waves of pressure on housing. From the outset Berkeley houses provided accommodation to boarders, lodgers, and roomers (and the occasional live-in servant) as well as family members so throughout the city during the first half of the twentieth century the mix of homeowners and renters was notable. In the second half of the century this trend continued with the creation of "in-law" units, garage conversions, and accessory-dwelling units on back lots. Simultaneously, in the 1950s and 1960s small apartment buildings, many with flat roofs and 'soft story' parking underneath mimicking Corbusian construction and ideas of modernism replaced demolished homes on some small city lots.

Architecture

Berkeley House Types and Their Characteristics:

With the exception of the lots in the highest hills, most of the ten square miles that comprise Berkeley was built out by 1940 so it is likely that your single-family home or duplex is a century old and it is probable that it looks much like it did at the outset. Exceptions are the mid-century modern infill structures built on gardens of older adjoining properties, or constructed when the original house was damaged, or perhaps it is on the site of an earlier house replaced, or radically rebuilt, by a previous owner.

What style is it? Study the footprint and massing of the structure, the roof pitch, the types and arrangements of windows and rooms, the character of the entrance, the materials, the surface cladding—together these will give you the character-defining features of the house. Consulting *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia Savage McAlester or a similar text will help you put a name to what you see. It will also help you understand if there have been substantial changes in the past that have altered the original character of the building. A key element of your study will be your detailed building description. This description will be both verbal and pictorial. You will find it very useful to photograph your house, including exterior and interior details. Useful books that describe styles and key architectural terms include:

Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*
William Morgan, *The Abrams Guide to American House Styles*
Francis D. K. Ching, *A Visual Dictionary of Architecture*
Carole Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture*

A house type is identified by its overall form--including characteristic footprint and floor plan--roof shape(s), surface materials and treatment, window types and placement, and sometimes its visual quotations. Some common house types in Berkeley include:



Queen Anne, 6th Street, ca. 1885

Queen Anne
Gable-end Vernacular
Italianate
Craftsman Bungalow
Four-Square
Stick Style
Shingle Style
Spanish Colonial Revival
Renaissance Revival
Colonial Revival or Georgian
Cape Cod
Dutch Colonial
Tudor Revival
Normandy Renaissance
'Storybook'
Prairie
Midcentury Modern

Character-Defining Features for Some Architectural Styles can include:

Queen Anne/ Victorian--Dominant front-facing gable, cutaway bay windows, decorative detailing at brackets and posts.

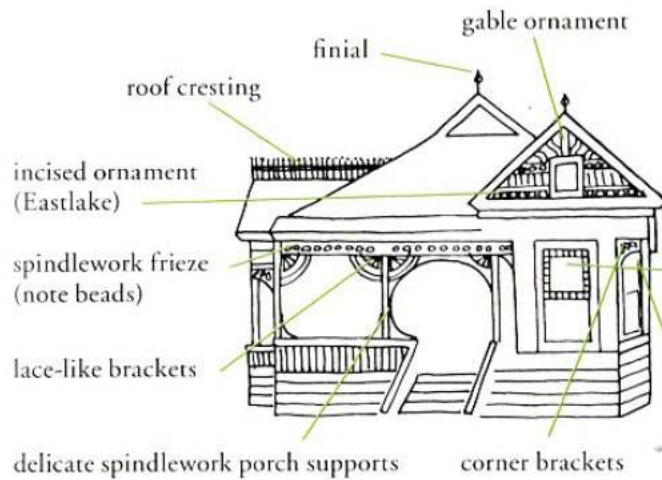
Craftsman Bungalow -- Shallow-pitch gable roof, shed dormer window, overhanging eaves, exposed rafter tails, wood siding, oversize front porch, large front-facing living room window.

Tudor Revival --steeply pitched roof, cross gables, faux half timbering on stucco surface, windows with multi-pane glazing including diamond-paned glazing.

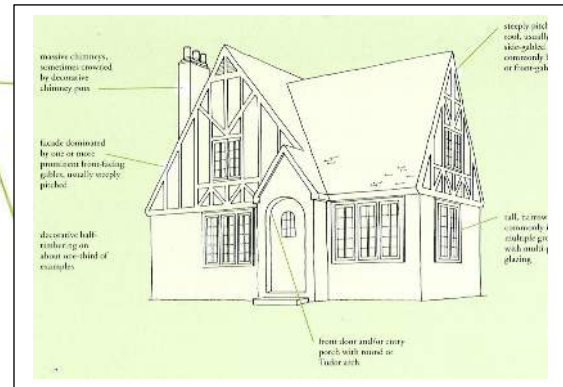
Spanish Colonial -- red clay tile roof of moderate pitch, asymmetrical façade, arched doorways, stucco walls, iron railings, stubby towers.

Midcentury Modern -- one story, low-pitched gable roof or flat roof, overhanging eaves, exposed rafter tails, post and beam construction, vertical-groove plywood siding, clerestory windows, carport or garage at front, recessed entrance.

Character-Defining Features of Some Berkeley House Types



Queen Anne 1875-1900



Tudor 1890-1940



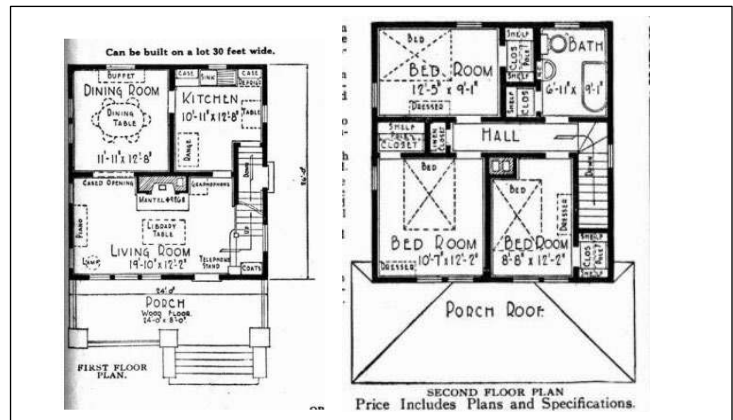
Shingle Style 1880-1920



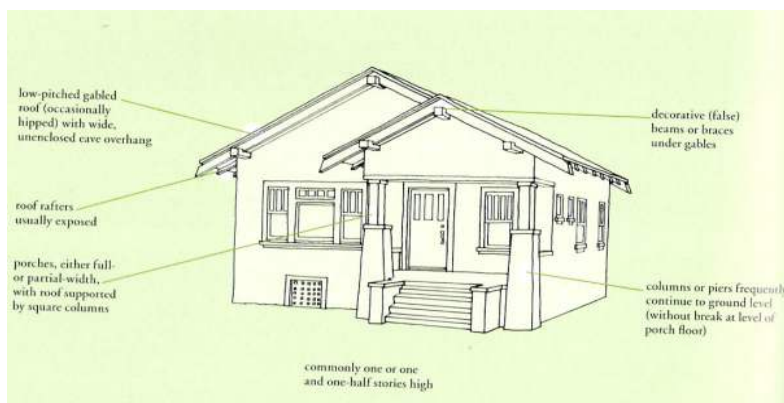
Colonial Revival 1876-1955



Foursquare 1890-1920



Foursquare Floor Plans, Sears & Roebuck, 1900



Craftsman Bungalow 1905-1930



Spanish Colonial Revival 1920-1940



Prairie Style 1900-1925

How Do I Research the History of My House?

You can learn when it was built, who designed it, who the contractor was, what major changes happened and when, and, in considerable detail, who has lived in it from its construction through 1950. You can also learn about appropriate windows, paint, wall materials, roof type, entrance treatment, etc. for your house type if your property has undergone changes you wish to reverse, or if you wish to make a change or an addition that is harmonious with the style of your home.

Steps to take:

- 1) Join Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association: <https://berkeleyheritage.com/> and the California Preservation Foundation: <https://californiapreservation.org/>
- 2) Start with the house itself. Walk around the exterior—are the windows consistent? The surface sheathing materials (e.g. shingles, clapboards, stucco) consistent? What are the most distinctive characteristics? Identifying its type/style will probably take you to the library. Learn what you can about houses of its type—what are the character-defining features including the footprint, design of the roof, entry treatment, arrangement of and type of windows, rooms.
- 3) Assume that the street number and street name have remained constant—in the cases where this is not true, investigate these changes using historical maps, especially Sanborn Insurance maps (see p. 12).



Craftsman Bungalow, Park St.



Craftsman Bungalow Typical Plan

Building Permit Applications

Finding facts about the physical character and physical history of your specific house will involve locating the Building Permits (filed when the house was originally built and when subsequent modifications requiring permits occurred), usually in city or county websites or records offices. For Berkeley, many historical Building Permits issued between 1909 and 1946 are available at BAHA (open Thursday afternoons by appointment in person after the BAHA archive reopens, or virtually by email request <baha@berkeleyheritage.com>) or from the city. Building Permits are foundational documents. This hard-to-read hand-written document will give you the date, names of the then-owner of the property, the architect, and the builder. It will describe the house-to-be with exact dimensions, number of stories, number of rooms, sheathing material,

cost, and other details. Subsequent Building Permits for changes or additions may also be available.

Alameda County Assessor's Office Records

Available at the Alameda County Courthouse, 1221 Oak St., Suite 145, Oakland is a hard copy Residential Building Record for your house prepared in the 1950s or 1960s and updated into the 1980s. These forms include a checklist of the house's features and a floorplan. Digitized records of ownership, residents, and valuation from the late 1980s to the present are available by request (for a charge). This Office also has records listing names of those who have paid taxes on the property—start with current owner and work backwards to get all owners in the Recorder's Office. The County Assessor's office may well be responsive to a telephone inquiry if what you need is a record of the original build. Note however, these records include inaccuracies.

Title Search

A title search at the Alameda County Recorder's Office will give you all the owners of the property. The staff at the Recorder's Office will show you how to do it. This can be time consuming but is the ultimate source and worth doing if you don't have the information from other sources. Before you do a title search, get as many owners and dates from other sources that you can.

Architects:

Research the architect if one is named on the Building Permit. Is this house characteristic of his/her building practice? Is it exceptional? BAHA has files on some architects. The Bancroft Library and the Environmental Design Archive in Wurster-Bauer Hall at UCB hold the archives of some of the better-known California architects. You may actually find the original plans for your house.



Four-Room Cottage, Ward St., 1910, John L. Stewart architect

Donogh Files:

See if your Berkeley house is included in the Donogh Files. These are informal unique records made by a Berkeley real estate agent, Ormsby Donogh, in the middle decades of the twentieth century (1939 to 1977) of many houses that changed hands in the city. They include descriptions of the houses (number of rooms—which may have changed since the house was built—names of the rooms, and who sold to whom when the property changed hands during those decades. Most useful, they often contain historical photographs taken of the front of the house seventy or eighty years ago when foliage in Berkeley was less dense so it is possible to see what has changed in the intervening decades and what has remained constant. In order to see scans of the Donogh files for the house you are researching make an inquiry for BAHA < baha@berkeleyheritage.com >. Not all the files have been scanned so you may have to wait until a new batch is scanned.

Sanborn Insurance Maps:

Sanborn Insurance Maps for urban areas from the 1850s will give you the street names and street number of your house, the footprint of the house, number of stories, materials, lot lines, the structure's spatial relationship to the street, and such ancillary structures as garages and water tank houses. These distinctive buildings with their tall flared sides supported groundwater tanks which--until municipal water mains and a regional fresh water system was established in the nineteen-teens—supplied household and industrial water needs in Berkeley's arid climate. Some have been made over into mini-houses. For tankhouses, see <https://aarongoldstein.us/tank-house-map>

For Sanborns see: <https://guides.lib.berkeley.edu/maps/sanborn> (UCB Library cardholders)

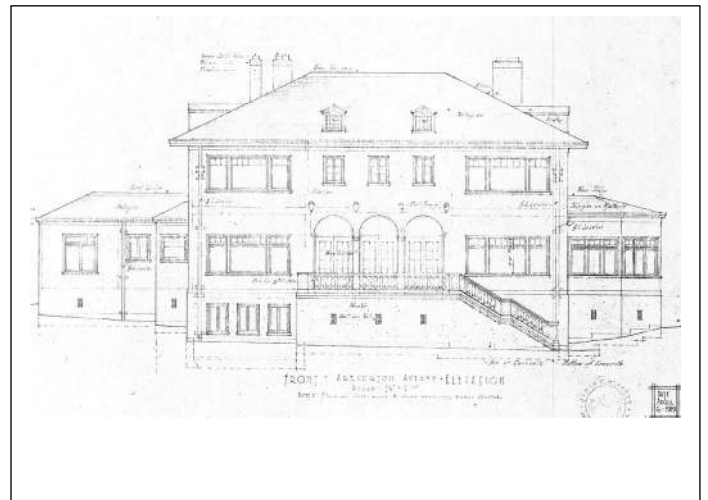
or, for Berkeley in 1894 or 1911 see Library of Congress Sanborn maps:

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/?fa=location+state:california%7Clocation+county:alameda+county%7Clocation+city:berkeley>

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/about-this-collection/>



Renaissance Revival, Arlington Ave., 1919, James W. Plachek



Elevation, Renaissance Revival, J. Plachek architect, UCB Environmental Design Archives

Google Earth Photos:

Check Google Earth views of the house—they can show you current details of the roof and the relationship of the structure to the site including neighboring structures, roadways, and plantings.

<https://www.google.com/maps/search/Berkeley%2C%20C...>

Historic Aerials

Historicaerials.com is a commercial source that is free to the public for basic research. You can see your house and its surroundings in aerial photographs in most cases from 1946 and to the present, and in topographic maps from 1895 to the present.

Architectural Journals:

The principal architectural journals that covered Berkeley, the *California Architect and Building News* and the *Architect and Engineer* are available online in internetarchive and hathitrust. If you know when your house was planned and built, you can sometimes find dates of permit applications and construction, contractors, and architects. The most prominent houses might be featured with photographs, plans, and articles.

People:

Learning who lived in the house can help you understand how the structure was used in the first half of the twentieth century when detailed records are available. Some of these individuals were distinguished members of the community whose accomplishments served their contemporaries (and us) in notable ways such as designing bridges and water supply systems, creating important housing legislation, and establishing hospitals. Others were members of cohorts such as faculty brought to Berkeley to teach who bought and built close to the university, or clusters of musicians as we find on Mariposa Avenue, or Pullman Car porters and others employed on the transcontinental railroads who bought lots and built homes near to one another in the San Pablo Park neighborhood located near the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe Railroad lines. Census records give us the employment of household members currently earning, family composition, and, importantly, also the presence of non-family members (boarders, lodgers, servants) up to and including the 1950 census.

Census:

To learn about the people who built and lived in the house the key source is the decennial U.S. censuses which give detailed information about U.S. inhabitants on a house-by-house basis until 1950. Census data is available through Ancestry.com which is a subscription service but is also available free in Berkeley Library using their computers or possibly remotely:

<https://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/search/website/Ancestry>.

The census gives us not only the names and ages of those in each household but where they were born; where their parents were born; whether they were naturalized; how old they were when they married; how many years of schooling they had, what employment by the Head supported the household, and other details that help us understand household structure, neighborhood commonalities, and the transportation infrastructures that enabled easy movement between home and places of employment.

An excellent 'how to retrieve data from the census' document designed by two UC Berkeley undergraduates can be found at:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1DwQ17p-ygFYDLIMT-ikuBM_G4M5IOSYAd6FTM4GNbPY/edit?usp=sharing

For the 1950 Census only see: <https://stevemorse.org/census/unified.html>



Tudor Revival, Shattuck Ave., 1930

Historical Newspapers:

Historical newspapers available through Ancestry, or Family Search, or California Digital Newspaper Collection (or newspapers.com, a subscription service but also available at Berkeley Public Library) are great sources for anecdotal information about people, obits, real estate ads, etc. Use keyword searches limiting by timeframe and location. Most pertinent are *Berkeley Gazette*, the *Oakland Tribune*, the San Francisco papers, and the *Recorder* which published property transactions.

City Directories:

Published annually in the late nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries, City Directories include most Heads of households in an alphabetical listing. Frequently the residence and business address are both listed. They are available at BAHA, at Berkeley Historical Society, and some library History Rooms. Many are available digitally at internetarchive.

Other Useful Sources:

See also Cal Digital Library Calisphere (<https://calisphere.org/>) and Online Archives of CA (<https://oac.cdlib.org/>) to find archives and Special Collections (for instance, UCSB, and UCB (in the Environmental Design Archives), both have extensive collections of some architects' drawings. Cal Poly has Julia Morgan's drawings.

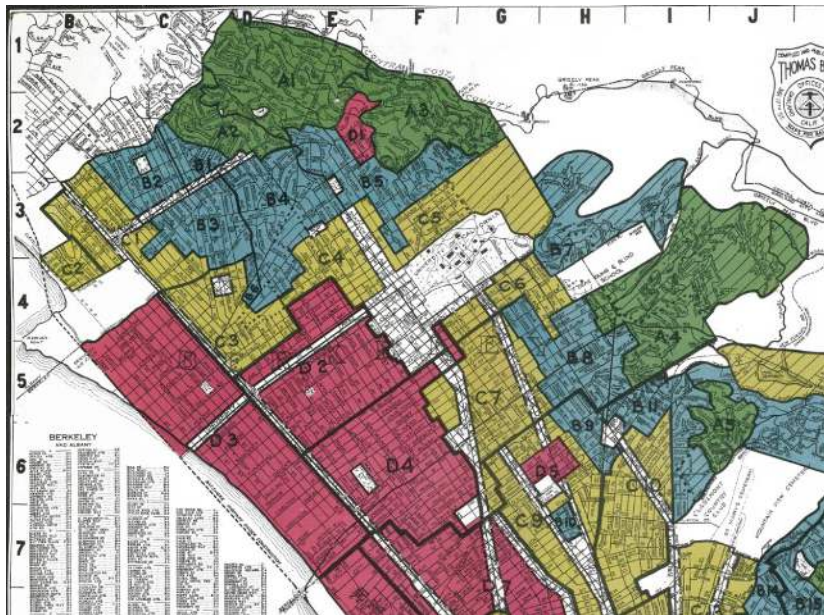
Local libraries, BAHA, and historical societies have old city directories in the Reference section or in the History Room; these repositories also have county histories, and often historical photos, historical maps, sometimes personal journals. Arcadia Publishing specializes in local histories and these may be useful for historical context.

Restrictive Covenants, Redlining, and Zoning

Often confused or misunderstood these three terms point to different land-use policies on the part of individual developers, the federal government, and the Berkeley city council. Restrictive Covenants were statements in some early twentieth-century Berkeley property deeds that prohibited the building of a saloon or the sale or rental of the property to individuals of "Asiatic or African ancestry." Curiously, these conditions of sale or rental were explicitly set to expire in 1930. It is a common belief that these restrictions were established only in the hills sections of Berkeley but this is not the

case—there were also “restricted” properties in the flats (for instance on Russell St. near Park St.). Early twentieth-century real estate ads sometimes included the terms “unrestricted” or “all welcome” to signal the absence of these covenants.

Because almost 9,000 financial institutions (nearly half the banks in business in the U.S. in 1929) failed in the early 1930s in a cascading sequence of catastrophic bankruptcies when homeowners lost their jobs and could not make their mortgage payments, the federal government sought to establish a real estate program to rescue defaulting homeowners and to ensure the banks wrote “good” mortgages that would not lead to default. The result was the creation of maps and reports called the Homeowners Loan Corporation Risk Maps of 1935-40. They were color coded for level of risk with red indicating the most “Hazardous” places to make loans. “Hazards” included known landslide zones (as in the area near the intersection of Eunice and Euclid) and neighborhoods in which the population was predominantly “foreign born” and/or non-white. Interestingly, the report accompanying the Berkeley map of 1937, pointing to D-4, the most ethnically-mixed neighborhood in the city, noted “good loans can be made here if care is exercised.” Discontinued in 1951, the Homeowners Loan Corporation maps nevertheless impacted downstream concepts of “Hazard” and real estate value, contributing to persistent “Redline” inequities. Generally speaking values were lower and it was harder to get mortgages in red zones.



Berkeley Detail, Homeowners Loan Corporation Risk Map of Oakland and Vicinity 1937

Zoning had been practiced in what became the United States from the early seventeenth century when slaughterhouses, tanneries, and other necessary but noxious activities causing stench and water pollution were assigned locations downstream from and outside the town proper. In 1916 Berkeley instituted a detailed zoning ordinance that continued that concept with a defined Industrial District where slaughtering, bone boiling, tanning, the making of gun powder, etc. could only take place beyond and separate from a light industrial district in which non-noxious industries could locate, both on the city’s western shore where factories of all kinds and the Southern Pacific Rail line had brought prosperity to the city and jobs to the

inhabitants for many decades. What the ordinance of 1916 is known for is identifying five residential categories: 1) One-Family Dwellings; 2) Two-Family Dwellings (duplexes); and several categories of Group Dwelling: 3) small two-story apartment structures; 4) Boarding Houses, Fraternity houses, student Club Houses, Dormitories; and 5) Apartment houses, hotels, lodging houses and restaurants. The ordinance says nothing about who was to live where or who was to live in what kind of structure (beyond university students who were assumed to dwell in dormitories, fraternities, and as roomers in single-family homes).

While single-family houses are today often associated with the largely-professional, largely-white hills sections of Berkeley, there were and are many minority homeowners throughout the city, some of whom succeeded in having the San Pablo Park neighborhood reclassified as an R-1 district (yellow on the map below) excluding all housing types except single-family homes in the mid-twentieth century period when that neighborhood was predominantly composed of Black families. That same group succeeded in foiling the profit-and-tax oriented move by the Santa Fe Railroad and the city to classify the margins of the Santa Fe tracks as Industrial rather than Residential. In other words, a broader spectrum of Berkeleyans than is often assumed have striven to achieve and benefited from the 'American dream' of a single family home (however modest) on its own piece of land (however small) within the context of a community of similarly-situated neighbors, as well as from the accumulating equity and sense of belonging generated by home ownership.



Berkeley Zoning Map of 1963. Yellow = R-1 (single-family houses), Beige = R-2 (single family houses and duplexes), Orange = R-3 (single family houses, duplexes, and small apartment houses), Brown = R-4

Advanced Research with a View to Berkeley Landmarking or National Register Nomination

Note: much of the information given in this section is derived from material made available in various forms by the California Preservation Foundation, the best source of information on most of these topics.

If your house appears to be a notable example of its type or of the architect's practice, or an important aesthetic achievement, or if one of the former residents achieved public distinction while living there, or if it makes a significant contribution to local or national cultural history, and if the house is at least 50 years old, its exterior largely original and intact (even if in imperfect or poor condition), it may be eligible for listing as a Berkeley Landmark or for listing in the National and/or California Register of Historic places. Placing it on a local or national listing will involve further research, good photography, and completing the necessary detailed forms for review.



Bungalow, 1913. Home of Walter A. Gordon, UC undergraduate football star; UC football coach; Berkeley City policeman; graduate of Boalt law school; Attorney; Judge; Governor of the Virgin Islands.

If you are interested in nominating the structure as an Historical Resource on the California Register of Historic Resources or as a Landmark or Structure of Merit to the city Landmark Commission these are some terms and concepts you need to keep in mind. Note that the structure must be more than 50 years old and eligible for nomination (significant in one or more of the stated categories and sufficiently preserved to its Period of Significance to exhibit Integrity).

Key Terms:

“Integrity” is a measure of how original the structure and its Character Defining Features are today in terms of seven aspects: location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with the property’s Period of Significance.

“Condition” is a measure of a structure’s present physical state. For these purposes Integrity is more important than Condition.

“Character-Defining Features” include overall shape and massing, materials, craftsmanship, decorative details, roof form, apertures, projections, trim, sometimes also including site, and interior spaces and features. Character-defining features should be repaired if possible; if too deteriorated, they should be replaced with same design, texture, and materials.

“CEQA” = California Environmental Quality Act.

“Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties” offer four approaches to historical treatment: Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction, as well as Guidelines for each.

“Period of Significance” (date or time span of historic or architectural distinction)



Mediterranean Style, Bellrose Ave.

Historic Registers and Landmark Listings

National Register of Historic Places (administered by National Park Service) in two categories: National Historic Landmarks and National Register

<https://npgallery.nps.gov/nrhp>

California Register of Historical Resources (administered by the Office of Historic Preservation) in three categories: California Historical Landmarks, California Points of Historical Interest, California Register

<https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/listedresources>

Local Registers (e.g. City of Berkeley Landmarks Commission and Ordinance)

Ch. 3.24 Landmarks Preservation Commission

Categories of Significance:

Criterion A/1 – Events (Broad Patterns of History)

Criterion B/2 – Persons (Culture)

Criterion C/3 – Architecture/Design/ Construction/Engineering

Criterion D/4 – Information Potential (Archeological)

Categories of Care

“Preservation” Maintenance, repair, and stabilization of existing historic materials—cleaning, painting, repair with sensitive utility upgrades and code compliance only.

“Restoration” Accurately recreating features and character of the structure at a particular period by removal of subsequent, or the addition of missing, elements.

“Rehabilitation” Retains, through repair, alteration, and additions the building’s historic character keeping the building’s distinctive features which may include sensitive historic changes to the original fabric while altering the property for modern use, including adaptive reuse with additions, but eschewing faux historic elements imported from elsewhere, and being mindful that new additions should be compatible in massing, scale, and features but differentiated from the historic building, and removable.

“Reconstruction” Recreates a non-surviving structure as it was at a specific date, based on detailed archival and/or oral histories.



Spanish Colonial Revival, Shattuck Ave., 1930

Generally speaking for your house you are looking at Rehabilitation being especially attentive to Character-Defining Features (see pp. 7-9). You will note that these are all external features, visually available to public view and that is the point: designation is about being a public (not just a private) asset. It is important, however, to also be mindful of internal characteristics of your house type if you wish to retain its full value. Interior redwood trim or board-and-batten paneling, for instance, is intended to be unpainted. Original light fixtures add value; they can be rewired. Window types and placement are key elements.

Examples of Private Homes in Berkeley That Have Been Landmarked or Put on the California or National Register of Historic Structures include:

Berkeley Landmarks: 611 Arlington; 2528 Benvenue

Berkeley Houses on National Register: 2307 Piedmont; 771 San Diego Rd.



2307 Piedmont (Thorson House now Sigma Phi), Charles Greene and Henry Greene, architects, 1907, Service Entrance, a National Register property.

Annotated Bibliography of Sample Articles Concerning Question of Whether Historic Designation Raises or Lowers Property Values

Been, Vicki. *[Preserving History or Hindering Growth? The Heterogeneous Effects of Historic Districts on Local Housing Markets in New York City](#)*. NBER Working Paper Series No. W20446. Cambridge, Mass: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014.

Designation raises property values within historic districts. Properties just outside the boundaries of districts increase in value after designation. There is a modest reduction in new construction in districts after designation.

PlaceEconomics. "A Study of the Impacts of Landmarking on Property Values in Palm Beach." Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, October 2021. <https://www.placeeconomics.com/resources/property-values-and-landmarking-in-palm-beach/>.

This study, commissioned by the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, found that landmarking had no negative impact on property values, either in current values, value change over time, value change following designation, or when accounting for differences in age, condition, size, water access, or location. Landmarked properties experience greater rates of value increase than do non-landmarked properties.

Zahirovic-Herbert, Velma and Karen M. Gibler. "Historic District Influence on House Prices and Marketing Duration." *Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics* 48, no. 1 (January 2014): 112-131.

Historic preservation generally is associated with average property value increase of over 5 percent. The restricted supply along with the value of prestige, protection of neighborhood character, and assurances that surrounding structures will be maintained and preserved appear to outweigh the costs to the average owner of restrictions on renovation and use.

Incentives to Research, Register, and Rehabilitate:

What are the Advantages of Landmarking My Property or Listing it on the California Register of Historic Structures?

Reasons to Landmark or Register a house include increased property value, Building Code advantages, and, under some circumstances, economic incentives such as the Mills Act (a statewide program currently "paused" in Berkeley) and other Historic tax credit programs that effectively trade a portion of property taxes for owner investment in rehabilitation.

- 1) Economic incentives are usually available to owners for rehabilitating certified historic structures. These include the Mills Act and other historic tax credit programs although the former is not currently available in Berkeley. Listing in the National Register qualifies a property owner to be considered for federal grants-in-aid for historic preservation. The Mills Act—available elsewhere in California--involves entering a contract with the California county or the city. In exchange for significant property tax relief over at least 10 years the owner agrees to spend a similar sum doing careful rehabilitation of the structure to specific standards set by the Secretary of the Interior. This exchange is most beneficial to people who have bought a significant property, at least 50 years old, with significant restoration needs but its architectural Integrity is intact, and the purchase is recent (so it would ordinarily be highly taxed based on that recent high sales price).
- 2) The structure can be exempt from certain mandated energy, seismic, and EMBER code upgrades. For instance, original wooden window sash may be retained.

In order to qualify for Tax Credit and Mills Act support the structure must have successfully gone through this process, that is, the building will have been nominated and identified as a Landmark, Structure of Merit, or Historical Resource. Your report will describe the structure, describe its significance, its relation to significant individuals or historical processes or events, or singular architectural achievement; it will take account of the unique features, outbuildings, and the relationship of the structure(s) to topography, settlement patterns, and community. It should be thorough, multi-faceted, accurate, and meticulously documented in text, in photographs, and in maps. It will make a case for the house, especially the house's publicly-visible exterior, as incorporating enough Integrity to express the historical period with accuracy.



Normandy Revival, Indian Rock Ave., John Hudson Thomas architect, 1910; photo from June 1913 issue of *The Western Architect*, p. 143.

The Mills Act (currently “paused” in Berkeley but available elsewhere in California):

This is a statewide property tax abatement program for both owner-occupied and income-producing Historic properties successfully listed on the National Register of Historic Places or located in a registered Historic District.

Originating in 1972 the Mills Act involves a 10 + year contract with the California city or the county in which the owner agrees to preserve, maintain, and rehabilitate the property in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior Standards.

The Mills Act recognizes the economic benefits of conserving building resources and “the important role historic preservation plays in revitalizing older areas, . . . building civic pride, and retaining the sense of place and continuity with the community’s past.” Mills Act contracts include some interior features (such as fireplace surrounds, flooring, built in furniture, and some mechanical systems); they also include some aspects of the landscape such as retaining walls. The Mills Act is a benefit to the owner of the structure entering into the contract, and if the property is sold, benefits and responsibilities accrue to the new owner. The property tax savings are between 40% and 60 %. But there are substantial out-of-pocket costs including application fees, inspection fees, and contract fees. Information on the Mills Act, is available in the Office of Historic Preservation, PO Box 942896, Sacramento CA 94296-0001, (916) 653-8911, malort@ohp.parks.ca.gov.

California State Historic Preservation Tax Credit:

Administered by the Office of Historic Preservation and the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee the California Historic Tax Credit dates to 2019. The owner of an income-producing property on the California Historic Register or the National Register can claim a percentage of the rehabilitation project expenses against state income taxes. 39 states have similar tax credits (generally at 20% against rehabilitation expenses) claimed after the work is accomplished. As expected, the emphasis is on Character-Defining Features and Secretary of the Interior Standards of Rehabilitation; the cost can include plumbing, drainage and such infrastructure issues. The theory is that Rehabilitated structures increase specific jobs and tourism revenues, and generally benefit the local economy. The tax credit is for \$5,000 to a maximum of \$25,000 for a \$125,000 project. Additional categories of benefit (+ 5%) include adaptive reuse for housing, and affordable housing. It involves a \$450 application fee. There are similar Federal Energy Tax Credits.

California Historical Building Code:

California seismic and energy code red tape is reduced for certified historic structures. Life-safety issues are, of course, unchanged but lesser issues can be handled with a view to preserving historic fabric and materials. For instance, single-paned windows in wood sash are usually ok but they need to be reglazed with tempered glass; some knob-and-tube electric service ok if isolated. Other factors, beyond code requirements, are increasingly less negotiable such as insurance company mandates concerning electrical, plumbing (galvanized piping must go), and heating systems. Note that the California Historic Building Code is interpreted differently in different cities, and most work on Historically Designated properties must have permits, and often issues must go through an Historical Review Board. The interior of Historically Designated properties is usually not regulated, but note comments above about the value of original interior features.



Prairie Style, Shattuck Ave., Purcell & Elmslie with Walter Ratcliff, 1914

Home Hardening, Energy Efficiency, and Seismic Issues include tempered glass--that won't break in heat--inserted into historic window sash; no air pockets within walls; shear walls with plywood on inside (better) or exterior walls; no spray foam insulation (it is flammable); or plastic moisture barriers as they can encourage mold. Note, seismic requirements are triggered if changes involve added load. If a new addition is constructed, this new portion is subject to the regular building code, not the Historic Building Code.

New EMBER legislation pertaining to certain neighborhoods requires replacement of plantings within five feet of the structure with stone, cement, gravel, and the replacement of wooden fencing and gates that touch the house with steel or wrought iron.

Note that Berkeley encourages the creation of secondary units (ADUs) within the established envelope of the house, a garage conversion, or an entirely new build on the property. However such units must be up to current codes and respect property line setbacks. Designing such units to complement the original structure and neighborhood is advisable from a value standpoint and neighborly from a community perspective.

Predicting Project Requirements:

Contractors—it is advisable to ask potential contractors about their experience with historical properties, and their knowledge of the Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

Preliminary exploration—opening walls, getting rough estimates—a way to start.
Site and Utility evaluations—120 amps are no longer ok; now 200 or 400 amp service is required. Water sufficiency analysis should be done.
Schedule development and Project phasing (noting that labor is consistently more expensive than materials).
Negotiated bids (usually better for historic buildings) or Fixed bids. Often Time and Materials for part of the job; the rest fixed.
Check out: *Rehab Right: How to Realize the Full Value of Your Old House* by Helaine Kaplan Prentice and Blair Prentice, City of Oakland Planning Department (1987).

What About My Neighborhood?—Can We Create an Historic District?



Mission Revival Duplex, Acton St.

Why Create an Historic District?

An Historic District is the designation of a contiguous group of structures within a designated boundary that, together, tell a story that is significant in terms of architectural and/or social history. Some structures within the boundary can be inconsistent with the overall character of the District; they are designated Non-Contributing.

The benefits of historic districts include the preservation of a sense of place with character; increased property values; sustainability in the reuse of existing resources, reducing landfill waste; more energy-efficient buildings in terms of natural light and ventilation suitable to local environments; education through tangible links with the past; economic benefits to local economies through tourism, shops, restaurants, restoration contractors; social and psychological benefits of human-scaled walkable environments; and a sense of community around shared decision making and goals. Historic districts can also spur investment nearby, adding vitality and innovation with new uses for unused or underused portions of buildings, including expanding the inventory of local housing units in renovated repurposed structures. The ‘character’ of Berkeley’s neighborhoods is what draws newcomers to the city; razing that character to house them in new overscaled ‘financially efficient’ characterless ahistorical structures

will be satisfactory to neither the newcomers nor the overshadowed residual neighbors. San Francisco has about 70 historic districts; Berkeley has only a handful. It can and should have more.

Examples of Neighborhoods in Berkeley That Have Been Landmarked or Put on the California or National Register of Historic Districts:

Panoramic Way

Delaware Street Historic District



Shingle Style Duplex, Piedmont Ave.



General Local Resources for education, research, and action:

- 1) BAHA annual house tours, and the booklets published in association with them, include a wealth of information on specific neighborhoods, houses, original owners, and architects. Those who volunteer to help can do the tour for free.
- 2) California Preservation Foundation Webinars
- 3) Builders Booksource, a great Bookstore on 4th Street

Webpages of Government Resources, and of Organizations That Post Scans of Helpful Primary Sources, Sponsor Events, and Produce Publications That Are Designed to be Helpful:

Berkeley Architectural Heritage Association

<https://www.berkeleyheritage.com/>

Berkeley Historical Society

<https://berkhistory.org>

California Preservation Foundation

<https://californiapreservation.org/>

The California State Historic Preservation Office

<https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/>

City of Berkeley General Plan Urban Design and Preservation Element
https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-02/General-Plan_Urban_Design_policies.pdf

Environmental Design Archives, UC Berkeley
https://ced.berkeley.edu/research_design/environmental-design-archives

Mills Act Property Tax Abatement Program (currently paused in Berkeley):
<http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1069/files/12%20mills%20act.pdf>

National Historic Landmark Program: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1582/index.htm>



Prairie Style, Mariposa Ave., Olin S. Grove, architect, 1911

National Register of Historic Places, Index
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>

[National Register of Historic Places](#) page for information regarding how that program works, including the [Bulletin 15](#): How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation; and [Bulletin 16A](#): How to Complete the National Register Form; and [Actions Taken pages](#), which include complete copies of the nomination forms for individual properties and districts that have been heard by the State Historical Resources Commission.
<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/federal-effects-of-nhl-designation.htm>

National Park Service: Technical Preservation Services (including publications on Identifying the Visual Aspects of Historic Buildings; Rehabilitating Interiors; Seismic Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/index.htm>

OHP Bulletin #6: California Register and National Register: A Comparison
<https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1069/files/technical%20assistance%20bulletin%206%202011%20update.pdf>

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:
<https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/stand.htm>

“The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, and Reconstructing Historic Buildings:” <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1739/secretary-standards-treatment-historic-properties.htm>



Other Resources

Accessor records as well as tract and parcel maps can also be useful in learning the history of a property. In some cases historic aerial photographs are available (U C Santa Barbara Library), retrievable by street address:

https://mil.library.ucsb.edu/ap_indexes/FrameFinder/

Public Records Act Requests can be made to learn a house’s permit history (you will need the parcel number) if it is not otherwise available. And a Chain of Title Guarantee Report will include deeds of everyone who has owned the property. There is a charge for both of these, and your inquiries will have to be made in person.

USGS Topographic maps, from the 1870s can be useful, especially for homes in rural areas: <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/topomapexplorer/index.html>

Also Check Out:

<https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/topomapexplorer/index.html?lat=41.86851322714356&lng=-87.63219353409474&z=16&sellat=-9755484.075397577&sellng=5142583.987314736&minDate=1882&maxDate=2014&oids=61616%7C61613%7C61354&f=#maps=&loc=-98.54,40.15&LoD=4.00>

https://savingplaces.org/stories/preservation-tips-tools-how-to-save-a-place-manage-your-personal-expectations?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_campaign=weekly

<https://savingplaces.org/story-categories/preservation-tips-and-tools-stories>

<https://savingplaces.org/stories/find-a-preservation-trades-program-skill-level>



John Galen Howard, Designer; Maschio Family, Stonemasons; Street Sign Cairn, Berkeley, c. 1910