



Henry Meade Williams Local History Department

Researching Homes & Buildings in Carmel

- **Polk City Directories (1926-1987)**: These directories were the forerunner to modern phonebooks, and listed the residents and businesses of the Monterey peninsula, though unincorporated areas like Carmel Valley and Pebble Beach frequently were not covered.. They weren't published every year, but we have a complete run of what was published for this area. The Polk's City Directories contain information on where the person lived and sometimes their profession/job. If the home is inside Carmel proper, it won't have a normal address; it will be listed as something like "Santa Lucia 2SE of Dolores street W side" or "Camino Real btw Ocean and 4th avs." Starting in 1951, the Polk's included a reserve directory for Carmel, listing each resident and business by their order on the street, which helps with the vaguer addresses. [Some available online.](#)*
- **Bell Telephone Directories (1935-1953)**: The Bell Telephone books sometimes fill in gaps that the Polk's miss, including listing the residents of Pebble Beach. Not every home had a phone in this era, so don't worry if a particular resident doesn't show up here.
- **Carmel Cottage Guides (1931, 1934?, 1937)**: The Cottage Guides are maps printed with the names of Carmel cottages and sometimes the owner. Useful if you know the name of a house, but not the location.
- **Inventory of Historic Carmel Buildings (2012)***: The Historic Resources Inventory was created by the Planning Department and is a compilation of all of the residential and commercial properties in Carmel-by-the-Sea that have been deemed historic. Each property has a report that gives information about the property such as the architectural style, architect, builder, previous owners, etc. The properties are in order by block number. If you don't know the block number, but you do know the house/building name you will have to skim through to look for that. The online version is text searchable. The current inventory (2022) lists the buildings designated historic, but does not include a property report.
- **Building Permits (1920-1933, 1939-1940)***: List of building permits issued by City Hall, including the date of the permit, block and lot number of the property, the owner's name and the contractor, in order by date. If you don't know when the house was built, you can skim through and look for either the owner's name, or the block and lot numbers.
- **List of Deeds of Property, Carmel Development Company Papers (1903-1935)***: During the 1930s there was a dispute between certain business owners who wanted to sell alcohol and the CDC, who had a clause in their deeds prohibiting the sale of liquor. However, some properties were actually sold by Santiago Duckworth, before the CDC was formed by Devendorf and Powers. To settle the dispute the judge ordered the CDC to establish which deeds of property it had sold since its inception. Arranged by date.
- **M. J. Murphy estimates/costs for home building/projects (1915-1917)**: These are M. J. Murphy's handwritten estimates for projects around the peninsula. Arranged in alphabetical order by the name of the property owner, and generally don't include the precise location of the property. Located in a binder by the librarian's desk.

- [Carmel Pine Cone & Historic Newspapers \(1915-2006\)](#): Early property transactions were sometimes listed in the local papers, and searching a property owner's or resident's name will frequently turn up short notices of individuals having new homes built, moving to a new address or taking up residence in their summer home. Available online at <https://archive.org/details/harrisonmemoriallibrary>.
- [Haines & Hill-Donnelly Reverse Directories \(1977-1989, 1993-2012\)](#): Covering most of Monterey County, these reverse directories list residents by street address first, and usually include phone numbers and information on how long they've lived there. In Carmel proper, they generally list residents on each street alphabetically.
- [Carmel Encyclopedia of Cartography, Volumes I-VII, by Don Howard](#): These books are located above the librarian's desk in between the Historic Resources Inventory binders and Building Permits binder. Don Howard has compiled Sanborn maps, early building permit information, and other maps and information. It must be searched by lot and block number. Each volume corresponds to a different section of town.
- [Carmel Preservation Foundation Collection \(C363\)](#): The Carmel Preservation Foundation was created in 1988 to come up with an architectural preservation ordinance for the City. The group of 30 members, under the leadership of preservationist and contractor Enid Sales, surveyed over 2,000 properties in Carmel. Approximately 300 structures or sites and four districts were identified as historically significant. CPF compiled their information from city files and took exterior photographs of each structure surveyed, which became the Historic Resources Inventory. This collection comprises all of the research (articles, maps, etc.) the volunteers did, plus block books 1916, 1930, 1946 for the city that list who held the property at that time. See finding aid for more details.*
- [Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps \(1910-1988\)*](#): The Sanborn maps showed every building in Carmel and its precise location. Early maps focused on the commercial district, while later updates covered the whole city. The earliest maps are available online; later editions are available in hardcopy in the Local History Department (collections C363 and C57). Though the Sanborn maps were not done every year, they are helpful when pinpointing when buildings first appeared on a certain lot and block. Additions can also be traced using these maps.
- [Local History Index \(card catalog\) / A Tribute to Yesterday / Creating Carmel](#): Most of the Local History Collections have been indexed in the card catalog, as have the books *A Tribute to Yesterday* and *Creating Carmel*, and the Carmel Pine Cone. These resources can be used to look up biographical information about previous homeowners, builders, architects, and the houses / buildings themselves.
- [Planning Department Records & GIS \(1950s-Present\)*](#): The Planning Department property files hold documentation on nearly everything built or remodeled in Carmel-by-the-Sea, organized by APN/lot and block number, including building permits, plans, correspondence, etc. Most of the records only go back to the 1950s, and they only encompass the one square-mile of Carmel. All of these files have been digitized and are available at <https://planningsites.org/CarmelPlanning/> These files must be searched by location; they cannot be searched by the resident's name. If the home is not within the boundaries of Carmel-by-the-Sea, building and permit records are held by the Monterey County Assessor's office in Salinas.
- [Monterey County Assessor's Office](#): When all other resources have been exhausted or if you're looking for information on a property outside of Carmel proper, try the County Assessor's Office. Make sure you know your APN (Assessor's Parcel Number) or at the very least know the exact location of the property. Some resources are available online, including indices of historic deeds, and listings of modern recorded documents at: www.countyofmonterey.gov/government/departments-a-h/assessor/on-line-services
 - Monterey County Government Center, 168 W. Alisal Street, Salinas, CA.
 - Phone: 831-755-5035 or email assessor@co.monterey.ca.us

Here are the two most common house / building related questions that the Local History Department receives:

Question: We are visiting town for the week and we are trying to locate the house that our relatives used to own. Can you help us locate the house?

1. Start by looking up your relative's name in the Polk's City Directories. As mentioned previously, Carmel addresses can be tricky. Sometimes the Polk's give detailed information and sometimes it does not. Depending on the time period, you can also try the Bell Telephone Directories or the reverse directories in the Polk's.
2. If you don't find anything, it could be that your relative only stayed in the area briefly or that they rented a house, which makes it less likely for them to show up in the directories. Sometimes areas outside of the city limits (like Carmel Woods or Carmel Valley) were also skipped by the directories.
3. If you think your relative was here in the early days of Carmel and you have an approximate address, you can either check Don Howard's books to see who originally owned the property, or check the block books from the Carmel Preservation Foundation Collection (C363).
4. It's always worth checking the Local History card catalog and the [historical newspapers](#) to see if there's any mention of your relative. You can also try Ancestry.com in the library; census records and death records can help you triangulate potential addresses against information from the other sources.

Question: We just purchased a house in Carmel and we want to know the history of it. Can you help us figure out who used to live in our house and if it is historically significant?

1. The first thing to do is to find your APN and check the Planning Department property files at <https://planningsites.org/CarmelPlanning/>. This will give you information on your property, including names of owners and builders, and sometimes architectural plans, generally going back to the 1950s.
2. From there, check the names you find in the historical newspapers at <https://archive.org/details/harrisonmemoriallibrary>. Hopefully, this will give you a lot of information on those individuals, sometimes including notices of real estate transactions and construction at their properties, as well as details of their personal lives.
3. In the Local History Department, check the Local History card catalog to see if there is anything on them in the clipping files or other local history resources. If there is nothing on the previous owners in the index, at the very least you can try the Polk's City directories to see if they list a profession.
4. You can also check Ancestry.com or the state death index, just to see if anything comes up. If you can figure out the date and place of death, you can usually track down an obituary, either in the *Pine Cone*, the Monterey newspapers, the *Salinas Californian*, or other local papers. Find them at <https://ci.carmel.ca.us/news-magazines>. The Pacific Grove Public Library also has a modern obituary index: <https://www.pacificgrovelibrary.org/obituary/index.php>.

Sometimes we just don't have any information on that particular house / building.