



Researching House Histories

Part Two: Researching People

Marie E. Daly
Waltham Historical Society

For many of us who own older houses, we often wonder, “Who lived in my house in the past?”

Who lived in the house?

- Identify the house occupants (owners or renters in the house)
 - Census records
 - Vital records (Births, marriages & deaths)
 - City directories
 - City annual listings (voter registration lists)

To identify the previous occupants of a house, you need to research in census records, vital records, city directories and annual listings. Let's take a look at 44 Pleasant Street in these records.

Census records

- Available on Ancestry & familysearch.org
- Address on 1900-1940

LOCATION.				NAME of each person whose place of abode on June 1, 1900, was in this family. Enter surname first, then the given name and middle initial, if any. Exclude every person living on June 1, 1900. Omit children born since June 1, 1900.	RELATION. Relationship of each person to the head of the family.	PERSONAL DESCRIPTION.								
IN CITIES.		House Number.	Number of dwelling-house, in the order of enumeration.			Number of family, in the order of abode.	Color or race.	DATE OF BIRTH.		Age at last birthday.	Males - Single, married, widowed, or divorced.	Number of years married.	Males of 16 and over.	Number of those children living.
Street.	Block.							Month.	Year.					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
Pleasant Street				Piper, Linda S.	mother-in-law	W. F.	Aug	1840	59	Wid		1	0	
		32	109	Staples, John P.	boarder	W. M.	Jan	1876	24	S				
				Wason, Frank P.	boarder	W. M.	Aug	1858	41	D				
				Weston, Florence C.	wife	W. F.	Jan	1874	25	M	D	0	0	
		44	170	Weston, Cora Weston	Head	W. F.	Jan	1866	34	D		4	4	
				Weston, Armin	daughter	W. F.	Aug	1886	13	S				
				Weston, Bradford	son	W. M.	Feb	1888	12	S				
				Weston, Cora	son	W. M.	Feb	1891	9	S				
				Weston, James	son	W. M.	Aug	1892	7	S				
				Wiltch, Lawrence	employee	W. F.	July	1836	63	W		4	3	

Census records after 1900 show the street address in the left hand column. You can access census records on the subscription website, Ancestry.com, and the free website, familysearch.org. The Waltham Public Library and the National Archives on Trapelo Road provide free access to Ancestry. Here we see the 1900 census for 44 Pleasant Street. The owner in that year was Cora Weston, a 34-year old divorced mother of four.

Census records

- Address on 1900-1940
- Lists whether owned or rented 1900-1940

CITIZENSHIP.			OCCUPATION, TRADE, OR PROFESSION of each person TEN YEARS of age and over.	Months not employed.	EDUCATION.				OWNERSHIP OF HOME.			
Year of immigration to the United States.	Number of years in the United States.	Naturalization.			Attended school (in months).	Can read.	Can write.	Can speak English.	Owned or rented.	Owned free or mortgaged.	Farm or house.	Number of farm buildings.
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
			capitalist		Yes	Yes	Yes					
			prescription clerk		Yes	Yes	Yes					
			branch clerk		Yes	Yes	Yes		O	M	H	
			real estate agent		Yes	Yes	Yes		O	M	H	
			at school	9	Yes	Yes	Yes					
			at school	9	Yes	Yes	Yes					

Further over on the page, we see that Cora Weston is a real estate agent, and owns the mortgaged house. So Cora was an unusual woman for 1900.

Vital records

- 1738 – 1850 records for Waltham were published
- 1841 – 1920 records on familysearch.org
- St. Mary's baptisms & marriages 1850 – 1900 on Americanancestors.org
- Social Security Death Index



Marriage, James H. Ellison, Waltham 1864



St. Mary's, Waltham marriages, 1868

You cannot search on address to find all the people who were born or married or who died at a particular address. In the 19th century, vital records did not list the street address. But we also have information from the deeds and maps about who lived in the house. So we can search their names in the vital records (births, marriages & deaths). For Waltham, the vital records to 1850 were published in book form and have been digitized by Ancestry. You can look at the book at the Waltham Public Library. Beginning in 1841, the state collected vital records, and these are available online on Ancestry, familysearch and Americanancestors. Saint Mary's baptisms and marriages from 1850 to 1900 are available on American Ancestors.

Vital records

- 1738 – 1850 records for Waltham were published
- 1841 – 1920 records on familysearch.org
- St.Mary's baptisms & marriages 1850 – 1900 on Americanancestors.org
- Social Security Death Index

Name: Veronica Deehan
SSN:
Last Residence: 01983 Topsfield, Essex,
Massachusetts, USA
BORN: 10 Jul 1897
Last Benefit: 02154, Waltham, Middlesex,
Massachusetts, United States
of America
Died: Jan 1981
State (Year) SSN issued: Massachusetts (Before 1951)

Social Security Death Index

The Social Security Death Index is available on a number of websites, but Ancestry gives the most detail. This is the entry for Veronica Deehan, who once lived at 44 Pleasant Street with her father, Thomas, and her sister, Margaret.

Vital records

- Later death records provide residence
- Death records can point to probate records & transfer of real estate
- Did widow outlive husband?
- Marriage records identify spouse's family through which real estate transfers

260 WALTHAM DEATHS.

COOLIDGE (see Coolidge, Coolidge's Poly. & Wilson and Macy, Nov. 27, 1778, in 4th m. G.S.)

COOLIDGE (see Coolidge, Coolidge), Eliza, a. Wilson and Elizabeth, Apr. 27, ——— G.S.

Elizabeth, wid. Capt. B[rooks], Nov. 19, 1803.

Hannah, w. Jonathan Esq., 50th, s. 1806 & 24.

John, a. Capt. Wilson and Elizabeth, Apr. 27, 1781, in 24th y. G.S.

John, a. Jonathan Esq., Aug. 9, 1804, s. 20.

Marshall, a. Jonathan Esq., Apr. 29, 1804, s. 11 m.

William J., Mar. 22, 1772, in 20th y. G.S.

William, Capt., Jan. 14, 1787, s. 25, G.S.

COOMBS, ———, ch. E. ——— [see July 2, 1841], s. 12 d.

COREY, Harriet, Matiah, ch. Anna and Matiah, Sept. 12, 1827.

CORKEE, William, b. Ireland, boat, June 21, 1749, s. 20.

CORSON, John, b. Ireland, clergy, Sept. 6 [1815], s. 24.

CORY (see Corey).

COUGHEY (see Coughey), James, m. b. Ireland, occupation, June 16, 1847, s. 47. [Coughey, G.S.]

COX, Charles H., a. Jesse and Sabra, daughter of Bart, Feb. 4, 1841, s. 21. [a. Jesse and Sabra, see 31, G.S.]

Hannah, ch. Jesse and Sabra, Nov. 24, 1822.

CRAFTS, Martin B., d. Joseph and Taberna, Sept. 10, 1821.

CRANE, John, May 24, 1812, s. 45. G.S.

Harriet, ch. John and Patience, Sept. 3, 1840. [s. 17 m. G.S.]

Mary Ann, ch. John and Patience, Nov. 2, 1818. [Nov. 2, 1818, s. 2 y. 7 m. G.S.]

CUSHING, Anna, wid. Rev. Jacob, D.D., Oct. 21, 1815, in 83d y.
Jacob, Rev. Dr., Jan. 18, 1809, in 79th y., "and in the 57th year
of his Ministry."

Here we see the death record of Reverend Jacob Cushing in 1809 in the published vital records. . When you are researching the occupancy of a house, remember to consider the surviving spouse and family. They might continue to live in the same house for decades. Here we see that Rev. Cushing's widow died in 1815. But the property remained in the Cushing family until 1847. Death records can give you a strong clue that a probate record or land transfer occurred around that time. Also, many times when you see a transfer of owners with different surnames, it may be the result of a marriage. James H. Ellison was the nephew of Sarah Alden Bradford Ripley, wife of Reverend Samuel Ripley. Ellison lived in the former Ripley house across the street.

City directories

- Available on Ancestry & Waltham Public Library
- 20th century directories arranged by street in back

Weston Alice Mrs., house 192 Adams
Charles H., boarding house, 157 Crescent, house do.
~~Clarence M., at Am. W. W. Co., house 289½ Moody~~
Cora B., real estate, 609 John Hancock bldg. (B.), house 44
Pleasant
~~George C., clerk (P. O. B.), house 99 Francis~~
Henry B., at Am. W. W. Co., house 110 Crescent

City directories were the phone books before phones. They often list names, addresses and occupations of working adults in alphabetical order. Women, even working women, were less likely to be listed, unless they were the heads-of-households. But if you don't know the name of the occupant, then you will have a difficult time. Here is the 1900 directory showing Cora Weston living at 44 Pleasant Street. It shows that she was in real estate & worked at the John Hancock Building in Boston. This would have been on Devonshire Street at that time.

City directories

- Available on Ancestry & Waltham Public Library
- 20th century directories arranged by street in back

***PLEASANT—From 445 Main to 2 Summer, wd 2**

12 Stanley Lawrence © A4-0063
17 Pinzone Jos © A4-3544
18 Callan Josephine © A3-1622
Ellison Park ends
26 Giardina Louis J © A3-7189
32 Mann Florence R Mrs © A3-0360
39 Bordenca Morris J phys A4-5565
40 Wilson Mary E A3-3933
Wilson Harold T © A3-3933
44 Deehan Margt E © A4-0949
45 Walsh John H © A5-0588
49 Towne Geo H © A4-0337
50 Arsenault Eric © A9-2818
Summer begins

In the 20th century, the directories had a section in the back that listed people by the street address. Here is a street listing for 44 Pleasant Street in the 1940s, showing Margaret Deehan. City directories are available on Ancestry.com, and the Waltham Public Library website.

Annual lists



Annual listings are very useful in determining the age of a house and who lived in it. These are essentially voter registration lists and poll tax lists. In Massachusetts and other states, people were required to pay a tax in order to register to vote. In southern states, poll taxes were used to restrict African Americans from voting. Poll taxes were deemed unconstitutional in 1966. These lists are arranged by Ward, precinct and street. So you do not need to know the name of the person living in a house, just the street name. They are available online on the Waltham Public Library website. On the home page click on online research, then click on subject listing, then genealogy.

Annual lists

[Waltham City Directories and Waltham High School Yearbook Online](#)

Copies of the Waltham City Directory are now available online thanks to the Boston Public Library, Digital Commonwealth, and the Internet Archive. They are being added gradually but will ultimately cover 1872 through 1990. Have fun investigating where your family has lived over the years, what they did for a living, or who used to live at your address!

Then click on this database, [Waltham City Directories](#).

Annual lists

The screenshot shows a web interface for selecting annual lists. The title is "Year". Below the title is a search bar. The main content is a list of years from 1886 to 1977, arranged in four columns. Each year is accompanied by a small icon and a count. At the bottom of the list is a blue button labeled "Apply your filters".

Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count	Year	Count
1886	1	1906	2	1936	2	1964	1
1887	1	1907	2	1935	1	1965	2
1888	1	1908	1	1934	2	1966	1
1889	1	1909	2	1933	1	1967	2
1890	1	1910	1	1932	1	1968	1
1891	1	1911	1	1931	1	1969	1
1892	1	1912	2	1930	2	1970	1
1893	1	1913	1	1929	2	1971	1
1894	1	1914	1	1928	1	1972	2
1895	1	1915	2	1927	1	1973	2
1896	2	1916	2	1926	2	1974	1
1897	1	1917	1	1925	2	1975	1
1898	1	1918	1	1924	1	1976	1
1899	1	1919	2	1923	1	1977	1
1900	1	1920	1	1922	1		
1901	1	1921	2	1921	1		
1902	1	1922	1	1920	2		
1903	1	1923	1	1919	1		
1904	1	1924	1	1918	2		
1905	1	1925	2	1917	1		
1906	1	1926	1	1916	2		
1907	1	1927	2	1915	1		
1908	1	1928	1	1914	1		
1909	1	1929	2	1913	2		
1910	1	1930	1	1912	1		
1911	1	1931	2	1911	1		
1912	2	1932	1	1910	1		
1913	1	1933	1	1909	1		
1914	1	1934	2	1908	1		
1915	2	1935	1	1907	1		
1916	1	1936	2	1906	2		
1917	1			1905	1		
1918	2			1904	1		
1919	1			1903	1		
1920	2			1902	1		
1921	1			1901	1		
1922	1			1900	1		
1923	1						
1924	1						
1925	2						
1926	1						
1927	2						
1928	1						
1929	2						
1930	1						
1931	2						
1932	1						
1933	1						
1934	2						
1935	1						
1936	2						

You can choose lists ranging from 1886 to 1977, and almost every year is available.

Annual lists

The screenshot shows a digital archive interface. At the top, a search bar contains the word "Pleasant". Below the search bar, a document titled "WALTHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY CITY OF WALTHAM, WARD 2. List of all Persons Resident in Ward 2 in the City of Waltham, May 1, 1886, assessed for Poll Taxes." is displayed. A red arrow points from the search bar to the document. Another red arrow points from the search bar to a zoomed-in section of the document titled "Pleasant Street." which lists residents and their addresses:


<i>Pleasant Street.</i>			
Blaney, Horace	44	Faden, Harry F.	18
Ellison, James H.	49	Whitcomb, John E.	12

This is the annual list for 1886. Annual lists were scanned by Internet Archive, and so they are searchable. I plugged in a search on the word Pleasant, and got this list of residents of Pleasant Street in 1886. Here we can see that Horace Blaney lived at #44 Pleasant Street, and that James H. Ellison was living across the street in the Ripley house. You can use these lists to determine when your house was built. But remember that your house could have replaced an earlier building. You also have to watch out for street renumbering. Make note of the neighbors, as this will help you in the case of street renumbering.

Newspapers

IN 1820,
The son-in-law of Mr. Williams, and his
successor in the ministry, was the Rev. Jacob
Cushing, and his parsonage on Pleasant street
remains. It was occupied after Dr. Cushing's
death, in 1809, by his widow, and then by his
daughter Bridget. She sold it and the remain-
der of the land to Mr. Henry Timmins, and
removed to Weston. This change from the
old homestead where she was born and had
always lived, affected her health and mind, and
she was brought back in the hope that it would
be the means of her restoration, but her days
were numbered, and she was buried from her
early home on the last day she was in legal
possession of the old parsonage.
This house, probably a century old, was
improved by the late owner, and now
belongs to Mr. Jas. Ellison. The dwelling of
Mr. Samuel Harrington, on South street, was
the model, and Dr. Cushing used to say, that
Mr. Harrington's estimate of the lumber re-
quired, was so accurate, that there was not
enough left to build his two bee hives.

Waltham Sentinel, 1/8/1857

 **DESIRABLE ESTATE IN WALTHAM**
TO BE LET—situated on Main and Pleasant sts.,
formerly the residence of H. Timmins, Esq., con-
sisting of 5¼ acres of land, house, stable and gar-
den with fruit trees, &c.—within five minutes walk of the
Railroad Depot. Apply to JAMES ELLISON, opposite
the premises, or at No. 29 Broad st., Boston. to mh25


Boston Evening Transcript, 4/2/1859

Newspapers may provide interesting data regarding property in the past. They can be advertisements for the sale of real estate, local newspaper articles on history and houses, and even real estate transfers and developments. Here we see two articles that I found about the house at 44 Pleasant Street in an online subscription database, genealogybank.com. A subscription costs about \$70.00 per year. They will not allow institutional subscriptions, so you won't find it at any libraries. They have the Waltham Sentinel, which is a locally edited newspaper that ranged from 1856 to 1876. Also, the Boston Gazette from 1719 to 1798, and the Boston Herald, the Boston Evening Transcript, the the Columbian Centinel, the Boston Traveler, the Boston American, and much more. They have the News Tribune obituaries from 1981.

Newspapers

IN 1/20.
The son-in-law of Mr. Williams, and his successor in the ministry, was the Rev. Jacob Cushing, and his parsonage on Pleasant street remains. It was occupied after Dr. Cushing's death, in 1809, by his widow, and then by his daughter Bridget. She sold it and the remainder of the land to Mr. Henry Timmins, and removed to Weston. This change from the old homestead where she was born and had always lived, affected her health and mind, and she was brought back in the hope that it would be the means of her restoration, but her days were numbered, and she was buried from her early home on the last day she was in legal possession of the old parsonage.
This house, probably a century old, was improved by the late owner, and now belongs to Mr. Jas. Ellison. The dwelling of Mr. Samuel Harrington, on South street, was the model, and Dr. Cushing used to say, that Mr. Harrington's estimate of the lumber required, was so accurate, that there was not enough left to build his two bee hives.

Waltham Sentinel, 1/8/1857

 **DESIRABLE ESTATE IN WALTHAM**
TO BE LET—situated on Main and Pleasant sts., formerly the residence of H. Timmins, Esq., consisting of 5½ acres of land, house, stable and garden with fruit trees, &c.,—within five minutes walk of the Railroad Depot. Apply to JAMES ELLISON, opposite the premises, or at No. 29 Broad st., Boston. 10 mh 25

Boston Evening Transcript, 4/2/1859

Here is an 1859 advertisement placed by James Ellison for the property he had purchased from the Timmons estate. It describes the parcel as 5 ½ acres with a house, stable, garden, and fruit trees and within a 5-minute walk of the train depot. The other article from the Waltham Sentinel in 1857 gives a history of the Cushing house. It says that his widow and daughter, Bridget, lived in the house until the Cushing heirs sold the property to Timmons in 1847 and moved to Weston. The move affected her mental health, and she was brought back in hopes that she might be restored. But she died not long afterward, and she was buried from the house on the day before the property was sold to the Timmons family. The article also says that the house of Samuel Harrington on South Street was the model for the construction of the Cushing house.

Newspapers

WARRENDALE HOUSES

The modern "insulated" homes that are being erected by the Housing Company, Edwin road, Warrendale, Waltham, are attracting much attention. They are constructed on a 10-year guarantee, which includes workmanship, material and equipment, and that they are damp, fire and sound proof.

As shown by the advertisement of the company in the Sunday Globe, they are of the English style of architecture, although many are of the Spanish style. Several bungalows are also included. Every house has a garage, and is so arranged as to afford plenty of light and air.

No improvement in the construction of a modern home has been omitted, it being the intention of the Housing Company to instal every convenience, great stress being laid to have them warm in Winter and cool in Summer. These houses are being sold from \$6500 to \$9000.

The Boston Globe ran real estate news columns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The articles reported particularly real estate developments. In Waltham, these included Lakeview, part of my neighborhood called Waverley Terrace, and in this 1927 article, Warrendale. The historic Boston Globe, which begins in 1872, is available online, every word searchable on the Waltham Public Library website.

Summary

- Deeds
 - Waltham GIS
 - Land registry > 1870
 - Familysearch.org < 1870
 - Probate records
- Maps
 - Waltham Historical Commission
 - Waltham Public Library
 - Leventhal Map Center
 - Library of Congress
- Inhabitants
 - Census records, ancestry
 - Vital records, familysearch.org
 - City directories, ancestry
 - Annual listings, WPL
 - Newspapers
 - Waltham Sentinel, genealogybank.com
 - Boston Globe, WPL
 - Waltham papers, WPL

To summarize what we have learned, you can research deeds starting from present day back to when the house was built on the city of Waltham's GIS site, the Middlesex Registry of Deeds back to about 1870, the Family History Library website, familysearch.org back to 1639, and real estate inventories in probate records.

You can examine historical maps that identify the house owners and panoramic views on the Waltham Historical Commission website, the Waltham Public Library website and in their collections, the Leventhal Map Center online at the Boston Public Library, and the Library of Congress website.

Summary

- Deeds
 - Waltham GIS
 - Land registry > 1870
 - Familysearch.org < 1870
 - Probate records
- Maps
 - Waltham Historical Commission
 - Waltham Public Library
 - Leventhal Map Center
 - Library of Congress
- Inhabitants
 - Census records, ancestry
 - Vital records, familysearch.org
 - City directories, ancestry
 - Annual listings, WPL
 - Newspapers
 - Waltham Sentinel, genealogybank.com
 - Boston Globe, WPL
 - Waltham papers, WPL

You can research the inhabitants of a house by researching census records on ancestry.com and familysearch.org.; vital records on familysearch.org; city directories on ancestry.com and the Waltham Public Library website; annual lists on the Waltham Public Library website; and in newspapers on subscription websites, such as genealogybank.com and newspapers.com, the historic Boston Globe on the Waltham Public Library website, and the News Tribune from 2001 on the Waltham Public Library website. The Waltham newspapers are also on microfilm at the library.