



How to Research the History of Your House in Peru, Illinois

Every house has a story, but that story is rarely found in a single document unless a history for the home has already been prepared. More often, the story is uncovered through discovery of many records offering smaller pieces of the larger picture. This guide is intended to help researchers find and assemble those pieces with a particular focus on homes in Peru, Illinois.

Establish your goals:

- What architectural style is my home?
- Who lived in my house?
- When was my home built?
- Are there unique or interesting stories associated with my home?



Determine your workflow

As you research and discover information, you will need a method to capture and document what you find. It is also a good idea to note where you found each piece of information. Often conflicting information is uncovered and having the sources can help verify the correct details. Find what works best for you - some researchers use all or some of the following:

- Spreadsheets: MExcel or Google Sheets
- Word processing programs: MSWord or Google Docs
- Notebooks, binders, folders, thumb drives
- Mobile device for capturing photos of documents if allowed



Start with what you know

A property owner is often given the following documents when they purchase their home. If you have these, you can make working and/or digital copies of these and read through them.

- Abstracts
- Deed
- Property survey
- Title Search



You may have also talked with neighbors about the house. If not, doing so may uncover local knowledge about the home and neighborhood.

Local Offices

City of Peru, 1901 4th street, Peru, IL 61354
815-223-0061, <https://www.peru.il.us/>

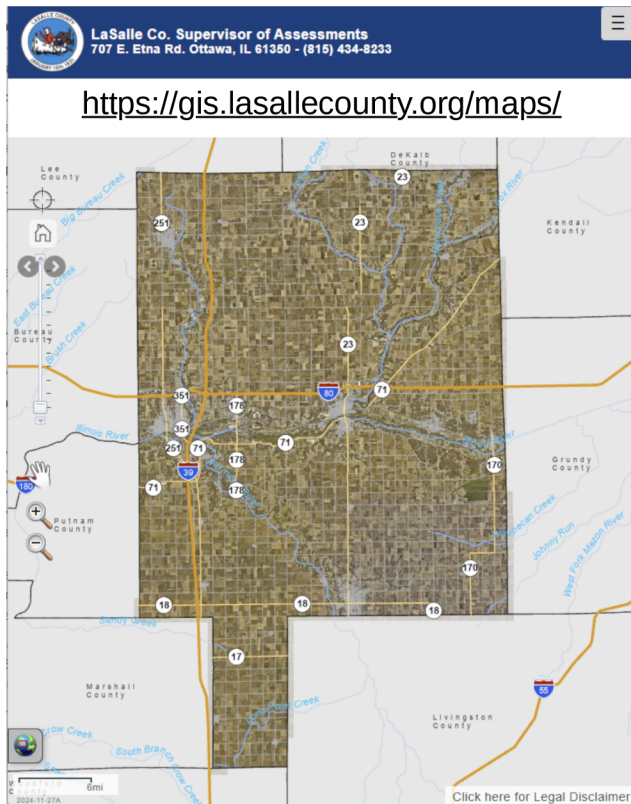
Peru Township, 1605 4th street, Peru, IL 61354
815-224-8238,
<https://perutownshipil.com>

LaSalle County Recorder of Deeds, 707 E Etna road, Ottawa, IL 61350
815-434-8226,
<https://www.lasallecountyil.gov/456/Recorder-of-Deeds>

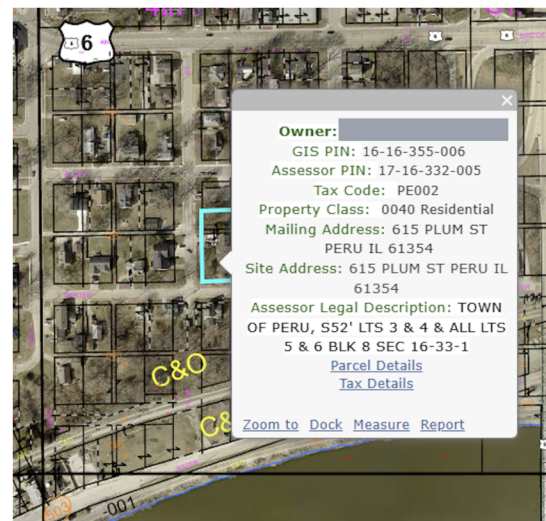
Researching the chain of title: the legal description

If you are interested in who used to own your home, you will need to establish a chain of title. This process creates a documented sequence of ownership for a property, tracing it from one owner to the next over time. Typically this is done by researching legal documents such as deeds recorded at the county.

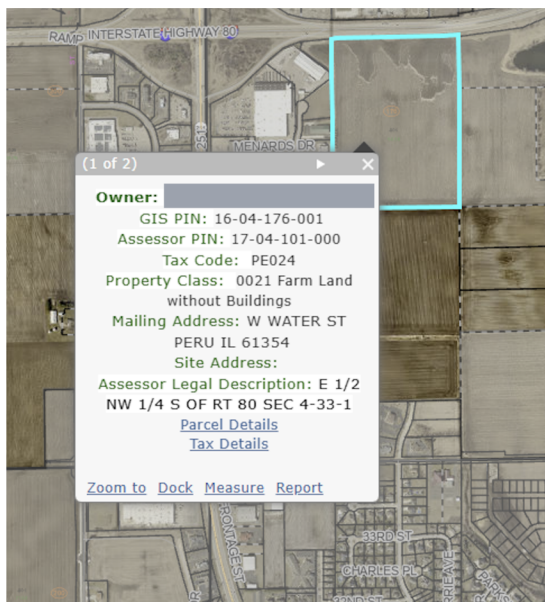
*Dad
Elias Keyes
To
Alonzo Walbridge*



To begin, you will need the **legal description** of your property. You can get this from your own deed. You can also find it by using the LaSalle County GIS map at <https://gis.lasallecounty.org/maps/> and clicking on the parcel (owner's name has been hidden for this illustration):



The legal description for a parcel within a city typically lists a lot and block and subdivision name. In this example, the subdivision name is "Town of Peru." The Block is number 8. And the lots are 5 and 6 along with the south 52 feet of lots 3 and 4.



Other information includes the owner's name (which has been hidden for the purpose of this illustration), the property address, and the tax ID number or PIN. In LaSalle County, parcels have two PINs or Property Identification Numbers.

Sometimes property is not part of a subdivision. If that is the case, the property will be described using the public land survey system. An example of a legal descriptions of land outside of subdivisions is shown in this image from the LaSalle County GIS. This abbreviated description means the east half of the northwest quarter, south of Interstate 80, of Section 4, Township 33 North, Range 1 East of the 3rd Principal Meridian.

Researching the chain of title: finding the deeds

Once you have the legal description, you can begin the search for deeds. Some people research beginning with the current owner and make their way back through time. Others start with the first owner and go forward to the current. While both work, and people should choose the method that works best for them, this guide will use the example of starting with the first owner.



Laredo

LaSalle County uses Laredo, an online search and document delivery program, to provide digital access to recorded deeds, mortgages, plats, and other real property documents.

Researchers can access the program at the recorder's office at no cost and only pay for copies of documents. The program can also be used to find and print documents off-site; however, a fee is required to do so. The County Recorder of Deeds can be contacted for more information about off-site access.

There are a few methods of finding deeds:

In Person Research

One method is to visit the County Recorder of Deeds at the county building on Etna Road in Ottawa. A photo from Google Streetview of the building is shown above. You can enter the building on the east side, go through security, then go up to the second floor. The people there can help show you the layout of the office and point you in the right direction for your search.

To establish the first deed for the property a search of either the lot or land index is necessary. These books are available at the Recorder's office, or digital copies of the books can be found using the Laredo program.

COPIES

When you find the document you want to copy, make a note of the book and page or document number and use the Laredo program to print it.

Land Index

For deeds issued for property outside a subdivision, you need to look in the Land Index books for transactions listed under the correct section, township, and range. Start in the earliest book and work your way through to the current year. At some point, entries were no longer made in books and instead will be found in Laredo.

Lot Index

The Lot Index books list the transactions for properties in a subdivision. You will start your search in the first book and work your way through to the current year. Use your legal description to find the entry by subdivision and block if applicable. At some point, entries were no longer made in books and instead will be found in Laredo.

Online Research

As noted in the section about Laredo, research can be done off-site using the Laredo program. However, this requires coordinating access with the county. And a fee is required.

There is another option for many documents recorded prior to 1900. The FamilySearch website has copies of the deed books and grantor/grantee indexes for LaSalle County at this URL: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/koha:531001>

The FamilySearch website is helpful to access copies of documents if you know the book and page. While Grantor/Grantee indexes are available, these do not provide the most efficient method of establishing the chain of title.

FamilySearch website also now offers a text search capability. By putting in a name or legal description and filtering the results to the right county and time period, relevant property documents may be found. While this method is helpful, relying solely on it may result in gaps in the chain of title.

Documenting your findings

Make sure to document each deed, mortgage, or other document you find related to the property you are researching. For each, you can write down the following information:

- Grantor (seller)
- Grantee (buyer)
- Date of transaction
- Date of recording
- Type of document (warranty deed for example)
- Dollar amount of transaction
- Abbreviated legal description
- Special notes or information

Other legal documents

Deeds are not the only documents used to convey property rights between parties. When a person dies, their will and/or probate may convey property to heirs.

Copies of wills and related probate can be found on the FamilySearch website at this URL: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/results?q.place=lasalle%2C%20il>

Some probate documents are also held by the **LaSalle Genealogical Society** (<https://lscgg.org/>). Their address is 115 West Glover street, Ottawa, IL 61350, 815-433-5261.

Mortgages, easements, and court cases may also provide legal information related to the property. It is also a good idea to get a copy of the subdivision plat.

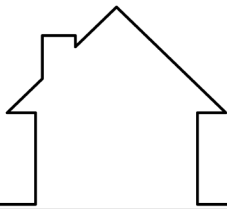


General Resources

While property research helps establish who owned the property on which your home sits, this does not tell the whole story of the people involved. What experiences took place within its walls? Research of the people and the community will help uncover those stories.

This part of the guide lists general resources that help you find more details about your home and its owners.

Address and Street Name Changes



Check records to see if there have been street name or address changes for your home over time.

Genealogical Research

To learn about the people who lived in your home, you can perform a genealogical study of the owners and possibly their families. This guide does not provide the process for doing this type of research. There are some resources for family history research here:

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Research_Resources

LaSalle Genealogical Society

(<https://lscgg.org/>). Their address is 115 West Glover street, Ottawa, IL 61350, 815-433-5261.

Westclox

There is a unique subdivision in the city of Peru that was built by Westclox called Westclox Addition on the county GIS.



It is located in the areas north and west of the LP stadium. This subdivision was started by Westclox in about 1920 to help provide housing options to its employees.

If you are researching a home in this subdivision, you can find many resources at the Westclox Museum. Plans and photos of construction of at least some of the homes are available along with typical costs.

Westclox Museum, 320 5th Street, Suite 265, Peru, IL 61354
westcloxmuseum@hotmail.com
 Ph: (815) 200-8604
<https://www.westcloxmuseum.com/>

Peru Library

The Peru Library is a great place to find historic information about your home. Below are some of the resources at the library. A detailed listing is at this URL:

<https://perulibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Local-History-Collection.pdf>

- Local history books
- Church history books and directories
- Statutes of Illinois
- Oral histories
- City directories
- LaSalle-Peru Township and St. Bede Yearbooks
- Inventories of structures in the I&M Canal Corridor
- Telephone directories
- Local newspapers
- Local plat/atlas books
- Farm directories
- 1935 Centennial committee minutes
- Peru Women's Club documents
- John Barron's columns

General Resources, continued

Historic and Architectural Resources Geographic Information System (HARGIS)

A public portal to Illinois' historic buildings, structures, sites, objects, and districts.

<https://maps.dnr.illinois.gov/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8f6e15ca8973412bbd534e6990da752d>

Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Town of Peru

A record prepared by the Federal government in the 1980s of historically significant buildings in Peru. A map with links to the report is at this URL:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1ccPbpkOr3ZadUH4THIVQHNTf7q1IZN8&usp=sharing>

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

Detailed maps originally created to help fire insurance companies assess risk in urban areas. They show building footprints, construction materials, heights, and uses. There are two sites with digital maps:

- Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/sanborn-maps/>
- University of Illinois: <https://www.library.illinois.edu/max/collections/sanborn-fire-insurance-maps-new/uiuc-sanborns-online-new//>

1937-1947 Illinois Historical Aerial Photography

A public portal to historic aerial photos of Illinois. Visit the URL and choose the viewer tab. Zoom to the city of Peru and click on the small squares in the area of your home. If you click a blue or red square a preview will pop up that you can click to see at a larger size. Note the date of the photo on the popup.

<https://clearinghouse.isgs.illinois.edu/data/imagery/1937-1947-illinois-historical-aerial-photography>

Bureau of Land Management: Original Land Patents and Plat

The original public land system plat for the area that includes the city of Peru:

<https://idaillinois.org/digital/iiif/IllinoisPlats/984/full/full/0/default.jpg>

The original land patents for land on which the city of Peru is now located can be found here:

<https://glorerecords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx>

Illinois Public Domain Land Tract Sales

This site lists the original buyer of public land tracts including the "school lots" in the original Town of Peru: <https://www.ilsos.gov/departments/archives/databases/data-lan.html>

Illinois Census Records

The FamilySearch website lists links to all census records available for Illinois. You may have to create a free account on the website to view and save documents:

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Illinois_Census

Peru Historical Society

The Society hosts meetings on the last Tuesday of each month at City Hall at 6:30 pm and posts on their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/peruhistoricalsociety>.

House Research Checklist



Address (Current/Past): _____

Legal Description _____

☐ Subdivision Plat

☐ Aerials

☐ Sanborn Map

☐ HARGIS

☐ HABS

☐ Other maps

☐ Deeds

☐ Mortgages

☐ Wills/Probate

☐ Assessments

☐ Court Cases

☐ Title Searches

☐ Abstract

☐ Land patents

☐ Newspapers

☐ Oral histories

☐ Neighborhood stories

☐ Local history books

☐ Photos

☐ City directories

☐ Telephone directories

☐ Farm directories

☐ Census documents

☐ Yearbooks

☐ Church records

☐ Cemetery records

☐ Vital records

☐ Westclox-related information

Based on research, estimated year of construction: _____