

## RESEARCHING A HOUSE IN BETHLEHEM

By Susan Leath, Bethlehem Town Historian  
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Many people ask if I have information or pictures about their old home in Bethlehem. The answer is “sometimes.” I am happy to check the Town Archives database for documents and photographs. While I can search on any word, the database is most easily accessible if you have a family name associated with the property. Where we go from there depends on what turns up in the database search. If it is something simple, I can pull the item and show it to you. If it is more complicated, we’ll have to make an appointment for you to come into Town Hall to do your own research.

Linda Stanley and Ellen Manning in their book *Inside/Outside: Finding a Sense of Place. A Building Research Manual for Albany County* suggests the following methodology for researching your house’s history:

1. Observe the structure
2. Check architectural guidebooks for date of style
3. Collect tax assessment data
4. Gather necessary deed work
5. Compile data from city directories
6. Check maps
7. Check additional appropriate sources - e.g., census rolls, registers of voters, wills, building permits, common council minutes, and secondary and other sources.

### Resources

The Town of Bethlehem website is where you can find info about the Tax Assessors office, Building Division, Town Clerk and Town Historian. There is an online assessment role system and all the town’s property tax maps are now online. <http://townofbethlehem.org/>

Albany County Hall of Records (<http://www.albanycounty.com/achor>) is where you find can lots of good tools, including an online version of *Inside/Outside* mentioned above.

Albany County holds the official deed records land in Bethlehem. Those after 1980 are digitally available. <http://albanycounty.com/countyclerk/onlinerecordssearch.aspx>

The Bethlehem Public Library has lots of excellent resources including their Local History page and Research page. (<http://www.bethlehempubliclibrary.org/index.asp>) The Local History page has local history books, images, and assorted other records. The Research page has access to Heritage Quest for researching census records. Go into the library for access to Ancestry.com and their physical collection of city directories and assorted history books.

Bethlehem Historical Association (<http://www.bethlehemhistorical.org/>)

Other resources are the New York State Library, New York State Archive and the New York State Historic Preservation Office and Historic Albany Foundation. Search their websites for online information and research tools.

### Bethlehem History Books

*Bethlehem Revisited: A Bicentennial Story*, edited by Floyd Brewer \*

*Times Remembered and More Times Remembered* by Allison Bennett

*Records of the People of the Town of Bethlehem Albany County New York 1698-1880* edited by Florence Christoph and Peter R. Christoph \*

*Bethlehem, Historic Tales of Bethlehem, and Bethlehem People and Places* by Susan E. Leath

\*Digital (and searchable!) copies can be found on the local history page at the library.

### Notes

Notes on tax assessment records – the Tax Office at Bethlehem Town Hall only has records from 1990's on. The archives data base has hit or miss records from about 1920.

Talk to previous owners, neighbors, and old timers!

Read old newspapers or periodicals from when your house was built.

The Altamont Enterprise is available and searchable on line. The newspaper dates back to the 1880s and has lots of Bethlehem references. : <http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/> Many other NY newspapers are here as well.

The Spotlight, the local Bethlehem newspaper, can be found on the library's Local History page. <http://www.bethlehempubliclibrary.org/local-history/>

Lots, and lots, of NY newspapers can be found here <https://www.fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>

Search the David Rumsey map collection for the 1891 Beers map of Albany County and other maps. <https://www.davidrumsey.com/>

The University of New Hampshire (<http://docs.unh.edu/nhtopos/Albany.htm>) has USGS quadrangle maps of Albany County (1893, 1927 and 1950) on line.

Something as simple as a Google search may turn up some good stuff. Also be sure to try Google Books or Archive.org.