



# • DESIGN • REVIEW • GUIDE •

## Historic Building Research

Burlington is well known as a community with a high quality of life, small and cohesive neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown and waterfront – all within a spectacular setting on the shores of Lake Champlain. This deserving reputation is due in part to the City’s small size, entrepreneurial spirit, civic-minded citizens and activist government. One of the many factors that makes Burlington such a great place to live, work and visit is the community’s attention to detail, and respect for it’s setting, heritage and quality urban design.

Burlington’s Design Review process strives to protect the city’s unique qualities and strong sense of place by carrying out citywide development and design objectives. The purpose of this *Design Review Guide* is to help applicants in preparing projects to be reviewed by the City’s Design Advisory Board and Development Review Board. Through materials such as this, the Department of Planning & Zoning seeks to make information available well before the final design of a project saving the applicant, and the city, time and money.

### OLD BUILDINGS

Burlington has about 11,000 buildings, and almost two thirds could be considered “historic” due to their age (greater than fifty years old). Just as people are fascinated by their own family history, understanding the history of your property can be an interesting and rewarding process. How old is it? What is the architectural style? Who built it? Did somebody famous or important live here or design it? How has it changed since it was originally built?

This edition of the *Burlington Design Guides* highlights some of the best places to look for information on historic buildings. You may also want to take a look at the *What makes it “Historic”?* edition to get a better understanding of what it means to be considered a “historic building,” and some of the benefits associated with such designation.

### WHERE TO GO...

Burlington is fortunate to host a wealth of great places to find information on older buildings. **Burlington City Hall**, and the City Land Records in particular, is the best place to start by helping you create a list of previous owners. This will help to identify the property as you go back in time. The City Clerk’s Office vault holds deeds and land records going back to 1865. This includes the owner, size of the parcel and buildings, how it may have been divided-up, and what permits have been issued by the City. Your address should be all you need to get started, but knowing your parcel number might help as well (just bring a copy of a property tax bill).



While you’re in City Hall take the time to look through the City Assessor’s records and the Zoning Permit files in the Planning & Zoning Dept. Both focus more on the buildings themselves and any physical improvements made over the years. The Planning Department also has a list of buildings listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places. Some 3,000 buildings in Burlington have been included so far.

The “mother-lode” of historical information is found in the **UVM Bailey-Howe Library Special Collections** (The Wilbur Collection). Contained within the walls of the library is an exhaustive collection of Vermont and Burlington information and artifacts including photographs, maps, charts, posters, directories, and newspapers. The professional staff are wonderfully helpful, and love to share their information.

Burlington’s **Fletcher Free Library** on College Street maintains a section dedicated to Burlington history complete with maps, photographs, books and newspapers. The library is a wonderful source for books on Burlington history, including several editions of the book *Historic Guide to Burlington Neighborhoods*.



*Fletcher Free Library*

Finally, try to speak with previous owners or even older neighbors who may still be living nearby. They may have some old photographs, or know a story that explains when a porch was enclosed or an addition completed.

## ...AND WHAT TO LOOK FOR.

### State and National Registers of Historic Places

Some 3,000 Burlington properties are listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places. The *National Register* is a listing of historic resources possessing national significance and approved by the National Park Service. *The State Register of Historic Places* is a listing of historic resources possessing statewide significance and approved by the VT Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Finally, the Burlington Planning Dept. maintains an inventory of historic resources - the *Burlington Historic Survey* - evaluated for their historic integrity and significance, which may or may not have been nominated for listing on a State or National Register. Each listing provides important information about each property, which in some cases is quite detailed.



Billings Library, UVM

### Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

Going back as far as 1867, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps provide an extremely detailed, building-by-building and lot-by-lot description of Burlington properties. Originally intended to help fire insurance agents assess the fire hazard for a particular property, these maps show general land use, building and lot size, shape, type of construction, and even the locations of doors, windows, roof materials, and fire walls in some cases. Burlington is fortunate to have regular updates (every 5 to 10 years) completed up to the late 1960's, and the UVM library has them all.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

Start with the earliest available map that matches when the building was built. If you don't know, then you can find when a building first appears on the map. The map will show an outline of the parcel and footprint of any buildings. The legend will guide you through all the codes. By starting in the beginning you can get a sense of how the property was first developed. As you progress through the years you may discover when additions were put on, when out buildings were built or disappeared, or if the lot size changed. Also, pay attention to the address of the property. It's not uncommon for an address or even a street name to have changed over the years. As an example, Manhattan Drive used to be called North Bend Street. This information is not only interesting, but it will help you reference the property when using other sources, such as directories.

### L.L. McAllister Photographs

McAllister was a photographer of the early twentieth century, and focused on everyday images of people and places in and around Burlington. This immense collection is catalogued by street and by place (such as the UVM Campus, etc.). Many photographs document street improvements such as new curbs, laying trolley lines, or paving. Collections of the photos can be found at UVM, and some are at the Dept. of Public Works offices on Pine Street.



McAllister photo of North Street

### City Directories

City Directories were compiled annually and were most often organized by address or street. They tell what was important to that household in that year, such as, who lived there, how many adults, how many children, where they worked and what they did, etc., It can also open the door to who and where the major employers were. These are also available at UVM.

## WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

- **Burlington Dept. of Planning & Zoning**  
149 Church St.  
Burlington, VT 05401  
802.865.7188 [www.ci.burlington.vt.us/planning/index.html](http://www.ci.burlington.vt.us/planning/index.html)
- **Burlington City Clerk and Treasurer's Office**  
Burlington City Hall, Room 23  
Burlington, VT 05620-0501  
802.865.7000
- **VT Division for Historic Preservation**  
National Life Bldg., Drawer 20  
Montpelier, VT 05620-0501  
800.622.4553 [www.uvm.edu/~vhnet/hpres/org/vdhp/vdhp1](http://www.uvm.edu/~vhnet/hpres/org/vdhp/vdhp1)
- **UVM Historic Preservation Program**  
Wheeler House, 442 Main Street,  
Burlington, VT 05405  
802.656.3180 [www.uvm.edu/~histpres/](http://www.uvm.edu/~histpres/)
- **Special Collections Department**  
UVM Bailey-Howe Library  
Burlington, VT 05405  
802.656-2138 [www.uvm.edu/libraries/](http://www.uvm.edu/libraries/)

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