"If Walls Could Talk:  
"Discovering the History in Your House"  
M. George

I. The obvious  
A. Check your paperwork (deeds, title, old family documents, mass of molding papers under the stairs, etc…) and write down all the names you see.  
B. Check your closets. Check places where a contractor or developer may have listed his name. Even check for stampings on wood. If you are doing a remodel check what is under the plaster.  
C. Take a walk around the neighborhood.  
   1. Look down and notice the stampings on the pavement. Look for the old street names on the corners. Look for contractor’s stamps mid block and also near the curbs.  
   2. Talk to your neighbors.  
      a. Get the neighborhood gossip. Who lived where, did what, killed whom. Many times your neighbors are working on similar local history projects.  
      b. Check out the information. Make sure you verify the stories your neighbors tell. Did George Washington really sleep in the clinker brick house?  

II. Los Angeles County Assessors (http://assessor.lacounty.gov/)  
A. The Assessors is the best one-stop source for property information.  
   1. Use it to look up current property details such as:  
      a. Date house was built and remolded, square footage, number of rooms, etc…  
      b. Type of property (single family, multi family, commercial…)  
      c. Recent sales in the area  
      d. Official assessor’s map, great interactive map.  
   2. For homes built before the city came into being (1921), and those homes in the county strip, check out the County Building and Safety Office located next to the Lomita City Hall.  
B. The Assessors is the place to go, if you are lucky, to get pre 1921 Torrance or 1964 Lomita building permits.  
C. Verify everything, the Assessor makes mistakes!

III. Sanborn Maps  
A. Sanborn maps were used for insurance purposes. They mapped out the footprint of cities.  
   1. Useful for seeing what was around at a certain year.  
   2. Great to see your home’s original footprint on the lot.  
   3. Will show old street names.  
B. Sanborn Maps are available from the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) on-line (www.lapl.org) click on “databases” and look under “History”. Remember you will need a LAPL library card to access the database.  
C. Sanborn Maps are spotty, they cover only a couple of years in Lomita, Torrance and Redondo Beach and nothing in PV.
IV. Building Permits
A. Cities issued building permits after incorporation (Redondo 1892, Torrance 1921, PVE 1939, Lomita 1964, RPV 1973…)
   1. Many early building permits are lost.
   2. Check *Lomita: A Century Remembered*, available at your local library, the 2nd edition contains assessor’s years for many houses in Lomita.
B. Finding the permits
   1. Consult old maps, city directories, the historical societies and city hall for possible street name and numbering changes. In Torrance, ask for “The Red Book”.
   2. Permits after incorporation may be found in the city’s planning office.
C. For the most part, the permits will supply limited, and not always complete, information:
   1. Architect.
   2. How much it cost to build.
   3. Type of construction.
   4. Developer.
   5. Date built.

V. The Torrance Historical Resource Survey and other Resources
A. Torrance Historical Resource Survey was conducted by volunteers in 1979 and 2012-2013. The survey has good information on the various styles of homes, even if it does not have your specific house. Be aware this information is dated and not always accurate information. Always try to verify any information you find.
B. City Directories are good to see who lived where and did what in the city.
   Many Torrance city directories 1922-1975 are now available on-line (http://www.torranceca.gov/LibraryArchive/)

VI. Newspapers
A. Local newspapers are the best source for real estate ads, things that happened at your address, planning and zoning history, neighborhood information and other trivia. The local newspapers were:
   1. The *Los Angeles Times*
      The Los Angeles Times Historical Archives (1881-1980s) is available as a searchable database remotely through the Palos Verdes Library and Los Angeles Public Library (http://catalog.lapl.org/validate/auth_rm.php?db=proquest_hist_latimes).
      The Historic Times is very easy to search, just select the year span you are interested in (the date the house was constructed plus and minus a few years) and put in some of the names you have been collecting (i.e. “Marble Estates” or “Mike George” and “Cota” or “Lemoli” and “display ad”).
      *The Torrance Herald* and *Torrance Press*
The Herald (1913-1969) and the Torrance Press (1949-1964) and some city directories are ON LINE (http://www.torranceca.gov/LibraryArchive/) and now can be searched by keyword!

**Daily Breeze**

The Daily Breeze mostly covered the Beach Cities but they still had good coverage of Torrance and Lomita. The Torrance Main Library has 1966 to present on microfilm.

The Hawthorne branch of the Los Angeles County Library has the Lomita Progress and the Breeze going back to the 1920s. ((310) 679-8193)

The Breeze is un-indexed. Search for your home by date.

**VII. Your Local, and not to local, historical society and library**

A. Much of what has been mentioned; street name changes, newspapers, history books and internet resources may be available in the library or at your local historical society.

B. Use Ancestry.com on the library’s computers. Look up census information about your house and the people who lived in it.

C. Please feel free to ask a librarian or historical society volunteer. Many times libraries and historical societies have information that is not indexed. Don’t know if there is a local historical society, house museum or other institution? Call the local library. They should know what is in their area.

I hope this companion handout will prove useful in your search for your home’s history. There are so many resources out there from old magazine articles, historical society records, city council records, house museums such as the Banning Residence, the National Archives (they have some of the original land grants) to CSU Dominguez Hills Archives (they hold the records for the Dominguez Land Company) that it is impossible to explore them all in such a short time. The purpose of this presentation is just to get you started on the basic exploration of area history; an exploration that I hope will provide you with a lifetime of fascination. Warning, history is addicting.

-- Mike George
Reference Librarian
Torrance Public Library