

# What is Local History? Activity Resource Sheet

## Events

TOPICS	QUESTIONS	SOURCES
<p>Crisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Epidemics</i></li> <li>- <i>Natural disasters</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did the community respond, who were the leaders, what institutions were created?</li> <li>• What places played important roles in the event, either from the impact or as a place for people to respond?</li> </ul>	<p>Newspapers Maps Census Government records Letters &amp; diaries Digital collections Photographs</p>
<p>War</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Civil War</i></li> <li>- <i>WWI</i></li> <li>- <i>WWII</i></li> <li>- <i>Korean War</i></li> <li>- <i>Vietnam War</i></li> <li>- <i>Gulf War</i></li> <li>- <i>Afghanistan</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who went to war? How did their families fare? What did women do in the war effort? Who did not participate or resisted service? Why did the community respond in varying ways? How did the population and environment change during and after the war?</li> <li>• What ties with military or service organizations were maintained once active duty ended? What use was made of veterans' benefits?</li> </ul>	<p>Newspapers Census schedules Memorials Veterans Organization and cemetery records Military service records Pension records Letters &amp; diaries Ephemera such as posters/recruitment materials</p>
<p>Nineteenth Amendment (Women's Suffrage)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who was for suffrage? Who was against it, and how did they express their displeasure?</li> <li>• Was the local fight fought on the same grounds as the national battle? Was the leadership local or from outside the community?</li> <li>• Did new voters change local politics?</li> </ul>	<p>Newspapers Memorials Letters &amp; diaries</p>

TOPICS	QUESTIONS	SOURCES
Financial Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did your town ever suffer a serious economic downturn? What happened, and how was it reversed (if it was)?</li> <li>• Have there ever been any major failures—of businesses or banks—that affected your town? What were the repercussions?</li> </ul>	Newspapers Letters & diaries Business records

## Communities

TOPICS	QUESTIONS	SOURCES
A company or business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When was the company founded? Why was it founded? How and by who? Did it draw on local resources, communications, or transportation connections? How has the company evolved? How has it responded to competitors and sought out markets?</li> <li>• Who worked for the company? Did this change over time? What impact did it have on the community? Did it try to train, educate or even control workers? Did it provide opportunities to minorities? Was there a union and how did that impact operations and working conditions?</li> <li>• How did business leaders work with community leaders? What trade associations did the company belong to? When did it join and what was its role?</li> </ul>	Printed histories Office/firm/company records Annual reports Legal records Accounting records Marketing and advertising City directories Census of manufactures Court records Credit reporting agencies Newspapers

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<p>Organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Religious</i></li> <li>- <i>Children's groups</i></li> <li>- <i>Voluntary membership organizations</i></li> <li>- <i>Cultural institutions</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When was the organization founded? Who led and who joined? What were its main goals/mission statement? How has the leadership, membership, or goals changed over time? How does it tell its own story or mark important milestones?</li> <li>• How does the organization make decisions? How does it spend money and distribute power? How has the organization responded to economic, social, or political changes in its community or neighborhood?</li> <li>• What traditions or public displays does the organization sponsor? When did they start and why? Have these changed over time? How has the organization interacted with other groups and the community as a whole?</li> </ul>	<p>Official documents Fundraising brochures Records of pastoral acts Official Reports to denominations Publications Building records Letters &amp; diaries Photographs</p>
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Public, private and parochial schools</i></li> <li>- <i>Preschools, colleges</i></li> <li>- <i>Trade and business schools</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When did formal education appear in your community? In what ways has it grown and changed? Who was responsible for founding schools or changing them? How was educational policy determined?</li> <li>• Who taught and for how long? What was their role in the community? How did roles and expectations of teachers change over time?</li> <li>• What was the mission of institutions? What was the preferred form of learning? What was the preferred form of discipline? When were buildings constructed, remodeled, or destroyed? How did this change over time?</li> <li>• Who attended different institutions? Did attendance vary at different times of the year? How and why did attendance patterns change? Did all groups experience the same curriculum, discipline, access, or treatment?</li> </ul>	<p>Published catalogs and handbooks Organization publications Institutional reports Textbooks Yearbooks and ephemera Newspapers Maps Buildings Photographs Census Letters &amp; diaries Meeting minutes</p>
<p>Work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did most people in your town do for work fifty, one hundred, or one hundred and fifty years ago?</li> <li>• Why did their work change or stay the same?</li> </ul>	<p>Census Newspapers City directories Letters &amp; diaries</p>

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Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which Native American tribes lived in your area? What happened to them?</li> <li>• When and why did different ethnic and racial groups arrive in your community? What institutions did they establish? How did the community respond to their arrival? What public displays have they established?</li> <li>• Was slavery ever legal in your town? When? How many enslaved people lived in the area, and what kind of work did they do? Why did the law change when it did? Who were the enslaved people who lived in your town? Who benefitted from their labor? Were there abolition or antislavery activities in your area? What happened after emancipation or manumission?</li> <li>• Where have different groups chosen to settle or been forced to live? Is there a history of redlining in your area?</li> </ul>	Census Newspapers City directories Letters & diaries
Crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the most common crimes fifty, one hundred, and one hundred fifty years ago? How were they handled? Who were the police? Who were criminals?</li> <li>• How did patterns of crime compare with national norms? Are there any famous cases that patrons regularly ask about?</li> </ul>	Court records Newspapers Police Records Local Government records Prison records Buildings Photographs
Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What political issues and movements have arisen in the community? How and why have they aroused, divided, or united individuals, neighborhoods, or groups within the community? What have been the patterns of participation and preference in elections? How have defeated individuals and groups relate to the community?</li> </ul>	Census Houses Maps Letters & diaries Ephemera such as campaign materials

## Families

TOPICS	QUESTIONS	SOURCES
Family structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where did the family live? Did they move? If related families lived in the same neighborhood or community, what was the nature of their interaction with one another? Did elderly persons live in their own homes, with their children, in retirement communities, or in old-age homes? Did family members who had moved away return to the family home for visits or extended residence?</li> <li>Who was considered to be a member of the family? If friends, boarders, or servants lived with the family, who were they, why were they there, what was expected of them, and how were they treated?</li> </ul>	Census Cemeteries Houses Maps Letters & diaries
Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many children were part of the family? Was the birth of children evenly spaced, planned, or unexpected? Where were children born? What role, if any, did family members or outsiders—friends, neighbors, professionals—play in birth, adoption, and childcare? What were the family's attitudes and experiences with adoption, foster care, institutionalization?</li> <li>What level of schooling did family members achieve? What schools did children attend, and how did they get there? Did they serve apprenticeships, undergo special training in the military, or obtain other types of education? If they went to college, how did they finance it and what did they study? What clubs and activities did children participate in?</li> </ul>	Census Photographs Newspaper Organization records Military records Letters & diaries School yearbooks
Family events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How has the family's diet and clothing changed over the years? How did changing technology affect the family; that is, when and how did such things as piped water and fuel, electricity, telephones, automobiles, radios, vacuum cleaners, refrigerators, televisions, microwave ovens, computers, cell phones, and so forth?</li> <li>What kind of family celebrations and reunions were held? What holidays and special occasions were observed, and how? In what kinds of social activities did the family engage?</li> </ul>	Photographs Recipe books Newspapers Letters & diaries

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Family activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did members of the family earn a living?</li> <li>• What was the nature and extent of military service by family members?</li> <li>• To what extent were family members involved in community affairs, charitable activities, reform movements, or local government? How and why did they or did they not participate? How, if at all, did they benefit from being socially or politically active? How and why did the pattern of participation change from generation to generation?</li> </ul>	Census Newspapers Organization records Letters & diaries
Marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who married? How did courtship happen and at what age? Who divorced, when, for what reasons, with what consequences? Did these practices change across generations? If so, why?</li> <li>• What ceremonies, rituals (including gifts and honeymoons) accompanied marriage?</li> </ul>	Newspaper marriage announcements Legal records Letters & diaries
Sickness & death	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who cared for sick, aged, orphaned, disabled, or dependent family members?</li> <li>• Where, if anyplace, were family members buried?</li> <li>• What were the family's practices in the event of a death? Who inherited what?</li> </ul>	Cemeteries Legal records Organization records Letters & diaries

## Locations

TOPICS	QUESTIONS	SOURCES
Residences/Property history research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When was the building built? What were its dimensions and floorplan? Did the building have porches or balconies? Were bathrooms an original feature, a later addition, or missing? Did the building have fireplaces, indoor plumbing, electricity, air conditioning or other features?</li> <li>What was its architectural style? How did it relate to others in the community? Did it ever undergo substantial remodeling or expansion? When and why?</li> <li>How was sleeping, living, and working space arranged? How was the house or apartment decorated, furnished, and equipped? How was property around the building used? What is the history of other structures on the property?</li> <li>Who lived in the building: owner or tenants? Did owners and tenants have conflicts? Was it used for any purposes other than housing? When and how did ownership of the property change?</li> </ul>	<p>Maps Town plans Newspapers Photographs City directories Plat map Surveyor's note Deeds Tax records Building permits Court records Letters &amp; diaries</p>
<p>Public places</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Post offices</i></li> <li>- <i>Official buildings</i></li> <li>- <i>Cultural institutions</i></li> <li>- <i>Commercial structures</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What were the most significant development projects in your town? When was it planned &amp; when completed? Who financed it? Who designed it? What is its style? What makes it unique?</li> <li>What is the development's relation to surroundings: physical geography, transportation, zoning laws? How does it fit into a community plan? Was it contested? Does it say anything about a particular person or group?</li> <li>How do passers-by interact with it? How does it manage people or influence behavior? Has this changed over time? How does it relate to the community? Has the community around it changed? Has the site reflected these changes?</li> </ul>	<p>Maps Photographs Plans Newspapers Letters &amp; diaries Ephemera such as postcards</p>

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Monuments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When was it constructed? Who financed it? Who designed it? What is its style? What materials were used? How does it compare to other monuments?</li> <li>• What does the monument say about a particular person or group? Are there inscriptions on the monument? How was it dedicated? Are there traditions or celebrations associated with it since?</li> <li>• What site was chosen and why? How does this fit within the community? How do people access or interact with it? Has this changed over time?</li> </ul>	<p>Maps Photographs Plans Newspapers</p> <p>Organizational records Speeches and dedications Ephemera such as postcards</p>
Neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the neighborhood defined? Was it built up over time or developed as one project? What are its boundaries, and what distinguishes it from adjacent areas? What have been the important institutions in the neighborhood (public spaces, churches, commerce, hospitals, prisons, and so forth) and what is their role in the neighborhood? How has the neighborhood changed over time?</li> <li>• Who has lived in the neighborhood? What family or other ties linked various households? What groups (ethnic, religious, occupational, or social) and economic classes have been represented over time? Has one dominant group been replaced by another? Have various groups clashed? What caused people to move in and out of the neighborhood?</li> <li>• What special traditions were developed in the neighborhood to promote a sense of community?</li> </ul>	<p>Census Maps Newspapers Buildings Letters &amp; diaries Neighborhood newsletters Original planning documents</p>
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When did paved roads, telephones, electricity, streetlights, water, trash collection and disposal arrive? Who received access?</li> <li>• Where did residents go to work, shop, obtain services, worship, and seek entertainment or recreation? How did they travel? How easy or difficult was it to move beyond the neighborhood?</li> </ul>	<p>Maps Town plan Government records Letters &amp; diaries Newspapers</p>



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Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there flora and fauna that used to grow in your town that is now gone? Does the area now have any common flora and fauna that has arrived more recently?</li><li>• How has the atmosphere, air and water quality, climate, terrain, and presence or absence of natural resources changed over time? How have these factors influenced this allocation of space and the design of buildings? How have they affected family, neighborhood, and community life?</li></ul>	Maps Town plan Photographs Letters & diaries Local organization records