

## **A Quick Start Guide for a Neighborhood Resident**

*Authored by Caitlin Caum.*

*Subject Area:* Perhaps, you have a building in your yard that has fallen out of use, and you would like to know more about its previous life? We will be discussing auxiliary buildings on a site such as historic mills, barns, and other farm structures. Typically, these are separate from a main structure such as a house, but they are often found on the same site or parcel. These buildings generally have names associated with the owners over time or with the main house on the site. Auxiliary buildings tell us a lot about the use of a site; this can include production, agriculture, or even special events for suburban and rural areas. However, these structures are sometimes lost to the landscape over time, so it will be important to keep your research flexible.

*Research Methods:* We will be relying on multiple methods of research to determine the site's history. These methods include VDHR V-CRIS system, maps (historic, aerial), primary source materials such as archived documents, and site visits.

*Research Questions:* This guide should help you determine how the site has changed over time, and it should help you produce a timeline of events and ownership for the building. It should also help you determine if there were any people using or visiting this site. Hopefully, this guide will ultimately assist you in finding history related to your neighborhood, and help you better understand the place that you call home.

*First Steps:* (1) We recommend starting your research with a quick outline/timeline. This should help you frame what you already know, what you hope to find, and what information is missing. You might even begin a simple online search using Google to find any mention of your property based on its name, location, or address. (2) We also suggest taking a moment to search for your particular site in the VDHR V-CRIS system ([VCRIS](#)). There is a public option (*Public Viewer*)

for searching historic sites in Virginia. Many registered buildings or sites on this website will have a survey or a description of the designation including some auxiliary buildings. You might have to write down the designation number found via the map to do more research online. (3) Keep in mind names change over time, so you might run into a new name for a particular time. Make sure these are recorded in your research timeline. The address location might prove most helpful during your initial search. (4) Ownership can also provide information about a site's history and use. You have the option to visit your local deed office. In our case, Albemarle County's deeds can be found in the Circuit Court Clerk's Office ([Land Records](#)). (5) If you find any owners, you can use their information to do additional searches. We recommend visiting local archives to search for the owners and/or the names of the site. The University of Virginia Special Collections Library includes documents from Albemarle County ([UVA Small Collections](#)), or Monticello's Thomas Jefferson Foundation resources are another option ([Monticello.org](#)). These searches should provide you with primary resources (or original documents). (6) Maps may also provide information that cannot be described elsewhere. Historic maps can provide information about the original site like where water once flowed in relation to this structure. For barns, it can show relative land use surrounding the area such as animal pastures, orchards, or crop lines. There are a lot of different options for searching for historical maps, so we recommend the USGS TopoView ([USGS TopoView](#)). Aerial maps can depict similar information, but the names listed on historic maps might be more helpful for further searches. (7) Lastly, we recommend trying to find general articles related to the type of structure you are researching via [JSTOR](#) or [Google Books](#) for background information. (8) Keep in mind that these steps listed above might make more sense out of their original order depending on the background information that you already have on the site or building. Best of luck researching!