



Feature Article . . .

This Old House . . . Just How Old Is It?

A Personal Guide to Researching the Age of your Heritage Home . . . by Roger Farr

Whether you are a true history buff (like myself) or you are the closest thing to it in your family, someone may have asked you to find out the age of their heritage house. As you will find in this article, conducting original research on an historic building involves equal portions of persistence and good luck. You never really know how it will end up. Of course, the journey is most of the fun. This article briefly describes how to research a heritage house using examples from one of my recent projects.

Part I: Getting Started

The very first place to start is the home owner(s). How long have they owned the home? Are there any old pictures or stories connected with the house? If there are any senior family members that have lived in the house, have a chat with them (and bring your notebook or tape recorder!). What you need to do is find out what people already know. Then you can hit the books and confirm it. If you already have an idea of the history of the house from the current owners or their relatives, you know where to start looking.

In the case of my most recent research, I had very little to go on. The current owner of the house on the corner of Regent and Aberdeen is Dr. Robert Christie. He purchased the house himself a few years back and has no connection to the previous owners. The only information I was given was that there were hand-hewn beams in the house that were discovered during renovations. I was also given a copy of the deed to the house. The deed is a very important document, and is the first thing to ask for after you have spoken with the owners.

In the Christie house, the deed went back as far as 22 March 1937. On that date, the house was sold to Stella Mary White by Idella Frances Doohan and T. Earl Doohan. The deed described the surveyors report of where the land was

situated. The deed also included this statement: "Being part of Lot No. 7 on the plan of subdivision of the Lynch property made by W. E. McMullin, D.L.S. dated April 1st, 1922, and on file in the York County Record Office as No. 86." Based on this information, I knew who the earliest deed owners were and when they must have owned the house. I knew how the house was described in the surveyor's terms of the time, where to look for a map of the property in 1922, and that it had been previously owned by the Lynch family.

The earliest owners and their dates of ownership are the points to start from when searching the title transfer records. When you search, look for owners' last names. A surveyor's report can be very useful as the terms and reference points should be the same if you have found the right title transfer document.

The next step is to visit the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick located on the campus of the University of New Brunswick. The archive staff are very friendly and full of information as to where you need to look. Please note that no pens or markers are allowed in the search rooms (pencils only), and you must register when you arrive.

I would recommend two things when researching. Number one is to keep some sort of folder with the copies and notes of your key evidence (photocopies of maps, title transfers, etc.). When you go to the Archives to do research, remember to bring it. There were several times when I forgot to bring all my documents and sure enough, I needed them that day. I would also recommend keeping a record of your key documents at home in a filing cabinet, desk drawer, or computer. This record should list what evidence you have found (names, dates, places, etc.) and most importantly, where you found it. For example, Elizabeth Kenney sold the house and property to Denis Lynch. My record shows the following:

- Denis Lynch from Elizabeth Kenney*
- April 9, 1888
- See Deed Book 87 p. 201-202 #37613 (F5655A)
- Elizabeth Kenney was listed as Widow of Daniel Kenney
- Sold for \$2,250 CDN

With this information, if I lost the photocopy of the title transfer, I still had all the pertinent information and I could look it up again with ease. The "F5655A" is the Archive's microfilm number, book 87 told me where to look on that film (most microfilm reels include two whole books) and the page number would lead me right to it. Creating this does take extra time, but it is a little insurance against a lot of possible headaches.

As mentioned before, I knew who the last known owners were and the date of ownership. The Archives staff showed me where the index reels were located for York County covering the year 1937. Researching title transfers is essentially a two-step process: you look up the appropriate name on the index reel, and then go to the reel that contains the actual document. It is a clumsy and painstaking process, but there is no way around it. When you look at the index reel, you will find that each reel only covers a certain number of years and is divided up between grantor and grantee. You should first check the index that covers the period of that last known title transfer. If that does not show anything, try searching progressively earlier indexes. When looking at the index, go to the grantee list and search for the name of the last known owner. Essentially, you know that they owned the property at one time, and are searching for the person that they bought the property from originally. If you find the right grantee name, there will likely be several listings for him/her. You need to record each of the references listed, and then go to the appropriate microfilm reel that contains the document. The reels containing the documents are

in the order that they were created, so once you know the general area that the microfilm reels are located in the Archives, you can work backwards to find the appropriate references. Remember, if you get lost, just ask the staff for help. They will be more than happy to oblige.

Once you find the right reel containing the document, just move forward until you find the appropriate page and read carefully. Documents on some microfilms are difficult to read because the ink has faded, but if you look closely, you can decipher the writing. The first thing to check is the names of the grantor and grantee. They should be the same as on the index. Once you have confirmed that the two names are correct, you have to confirm that they are selling the right piece of property. This is where you must refer to the surveyor's terms and reference points as found on the deed. Are they the same?

To complicate matters, surveyor's in the nineteenth century often used terms such as "four chains of four poles each." Chains, poles and rods were standard units of measure back then. At some point in the title transfers, the chains and poles will turn into yards and feet. Documenting that link by showing the correct grantee and grantor, and the correct street references will allow you to "translate" the measurements. Now, you can use the older terms to check earlier title transfers.

The job of researching a heritage house is basically what I have just described, going back and forth through the title transfers. If the house goes back far enough, you may want to check the Crown Land Grants for your area. However, most houses in existence today date from the mid-nineteenth century or later. The combination of old age, new construction and fire have generally eliminated the earliest houses.

Part 2: When you get stuck!

I hinted at the beginning of this article that sometimes there are problems in researching a house. The most common problem I have found relates to inheritance. Houses were often inherited by the surviving spouse or children. This is not usually reflected in the title transfers. The problem occurs when you run out of references for a particular name. In my re-

search the last known owners on the deed were Idella Frances and T. Earl Doohan. There was no mention of where they received the property from. In order to get around the problem, I looked up the census data for the appropriate time period and place. By looking at the problem from this angle, I discovered the 1901 Census listed the Doohan family in the City of Fredericton (Polling Sub-division 4, page 5).

Based on the census, I knew that Idella Frances and T. Earl Doohan were not "Wife and Husband" but "Mother and Son." The husband's name was Micheal M. Doohan, and when I looked for that name in the title transfer index, I found the link. Micheal M. Doohan had purchased the property from Margaret Lynch on 13 June 1919.

Further research found that Margaret Lynch purchased the property from Marion Gertrude Lynch et al. on 15 March 1903 for the sum of \$2,000. The "et al" was explained in the long document to include Elizabeth, her mother. The document was twisted in legal jargon and difficult to read, but it turned into a real gem of a story after some more research.

Part 3: The Lynch Story

Based on an earlier title transfer, I found that the house had been purchased by Denis Lynch from Elizabeth Kenney (Widow of Daniel Kenney) on 9 April 1888 for \$2,250. On or about 3 March 1894, Denis Lynch died without a legal will. Somehow, his wishes must have been made clear, because it is recorded that the house and property were to be given to his daughter Marion. However, Marion was still a legal minor at the time. To complicate matters, Denis Lynch's widow, Elizabeth, later married Phillip Sullivan of Stanley and moved to her husband's home with her daughter Marion.

Thus ensues a legal battle that lasted eight years! It was not until 7 October 1902 that the Supreme Court of Equity made a ruling on the case. Elizabeth Sullivan (formerly Lynch) was to become the guardian of the personal estate of her daughter, Marion. To ensure that there

would be money left for Marion when she came of age, Elizabeth was to put up a bond of \$1,000 and two sureties each of \$500 (a total sum of \$2,000) to be put aside from any sale of the property concerned.

Name		D.O.B.	Race	Birth	Immigrated
Micheal M. Doohan		Sept.5, 1867	Irish	NB	
	Religion: Roman Catholic				
	Trade: Grocer				
Idella	Wife	Dec.2, 1875	American	Maine US	1900
Dorothy	Daughter	Sept.5,1896	Irish	US	1900
Thomas E.	Son	Mar.8, 1897	"	"	"
Mary	Son	Aug.18,1898	"	"	"

These conditions were met and the property was released into Elizabeth Sullivan's hands. Six months later, Elizabeth (representing Marion Gertrude) sold the property to Margaret Lynch for the sum of \$2,000.

While this tale demonstrates the need for all property owners to have a legal will, it has a stranger side to it. How did Denis Lynch explain his wishes for Marion alone to receive the property when there was no will? How did a legal minor like Marion fight her own mother for eight years until the matter was decided by the courts? Was there a connection between the family of Denis Lynch and Margaret Lynch who finally purchased the property? We will probably never know the whole story, but it certainly made my day when my research discovered it.

Part 4: When you get stumped!

As mentioned above, the house that I researched had been purchased by Denis Lynch from Elizabeth Kenney (listed as widow of Daniel Kenney). Since Daniel Kenney's name had been mentioned, I searched the records to find out from whom he had bought the house. This led me to William Little Stewart (a Colonel in the British Army) and his wife Eliza Saunders Stewart, who sold the house to Daniel on 6 February 1885 for \$1,250.

I then tried to discover who the Stewarts had bought the house from but was stumped. For hours I went in circles and found nothing. The title transfer index showed no trace of the purchase. By looking at tax records for the City of

Frederickton, I was able to find out that William Little Stewart was legally considered to be a non-resident and had a local lawyer named H.B. Rainsford acting as his agent. This could be the reason why Eliza Saunders Stewart was listed as a co-owner when they sold the house to Daniel Kenney. In the nineteenth century, the husband usually held the property and wives were not mentioned except for a specific reason.

Despite my best efforts, I could not

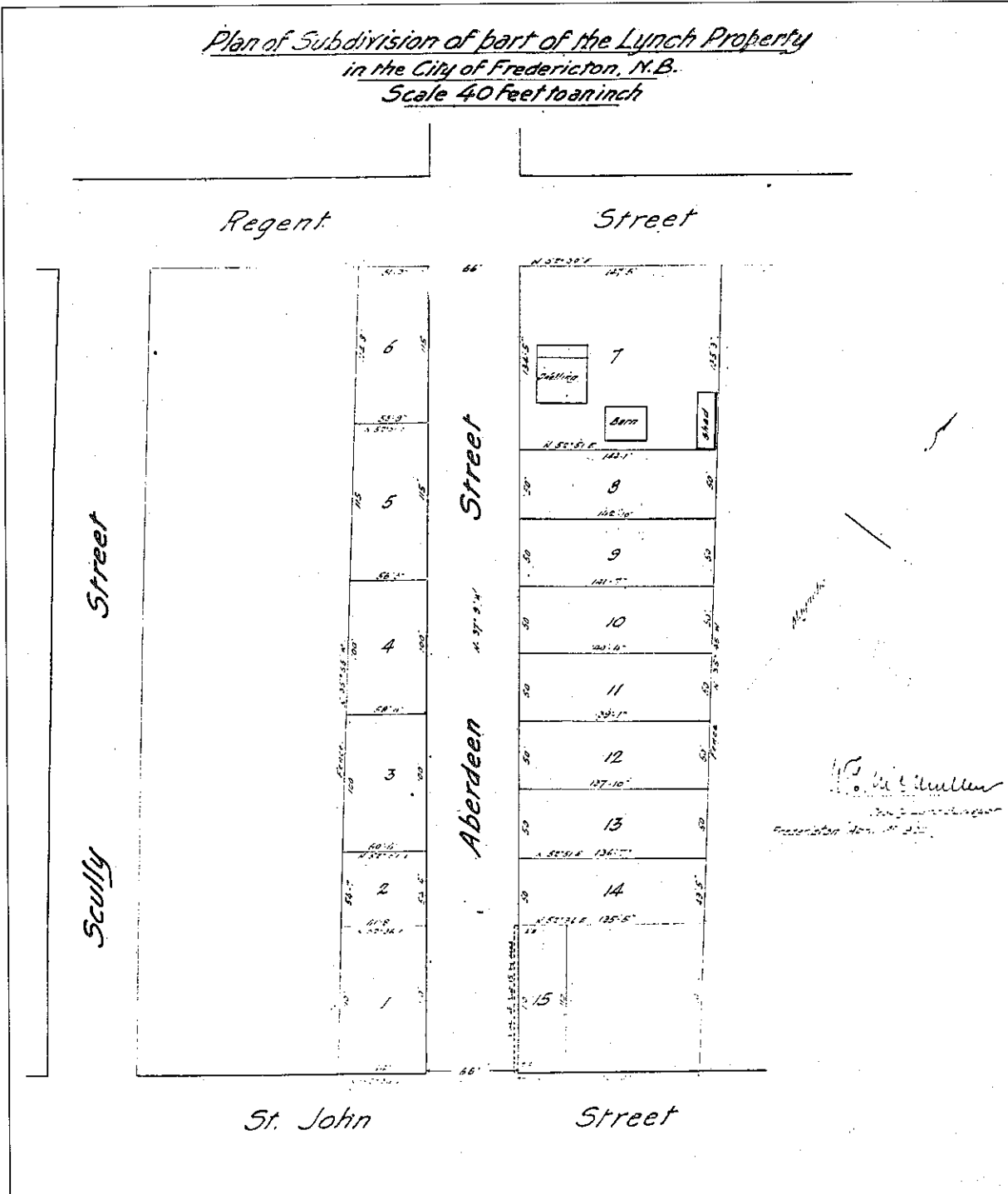
find a trace of the house before the sale in 1885. This could mean one of two things: either the documents of its earlier existence no longer exist, or it was built in the 1870s to 1880s. The current owner mentioned that there were hand-hewn beams in the house which would indicate a much earlier building date, but as was common in the past, these beams could have been borrowed and re-used from some other older structure.

Unfortunately, research does not al-

ways end up neatly, sometimes it just ends. When you have truly lost interest in the project and gone back several times without success, it is probably best to stop there, write up your findings, and move on to a new project. There are always more owners wanting you to find out the age of "this old house." *

Roger Farr is a member of the Historical Society and volunteer at the Museum.

*Plan of Subdivision of part of the Lynch Property
in the City of Frederickton, N.B.
Scale 40 feet to an inch*



The Christie property on the corner of Regent and Aberdeen Streets.

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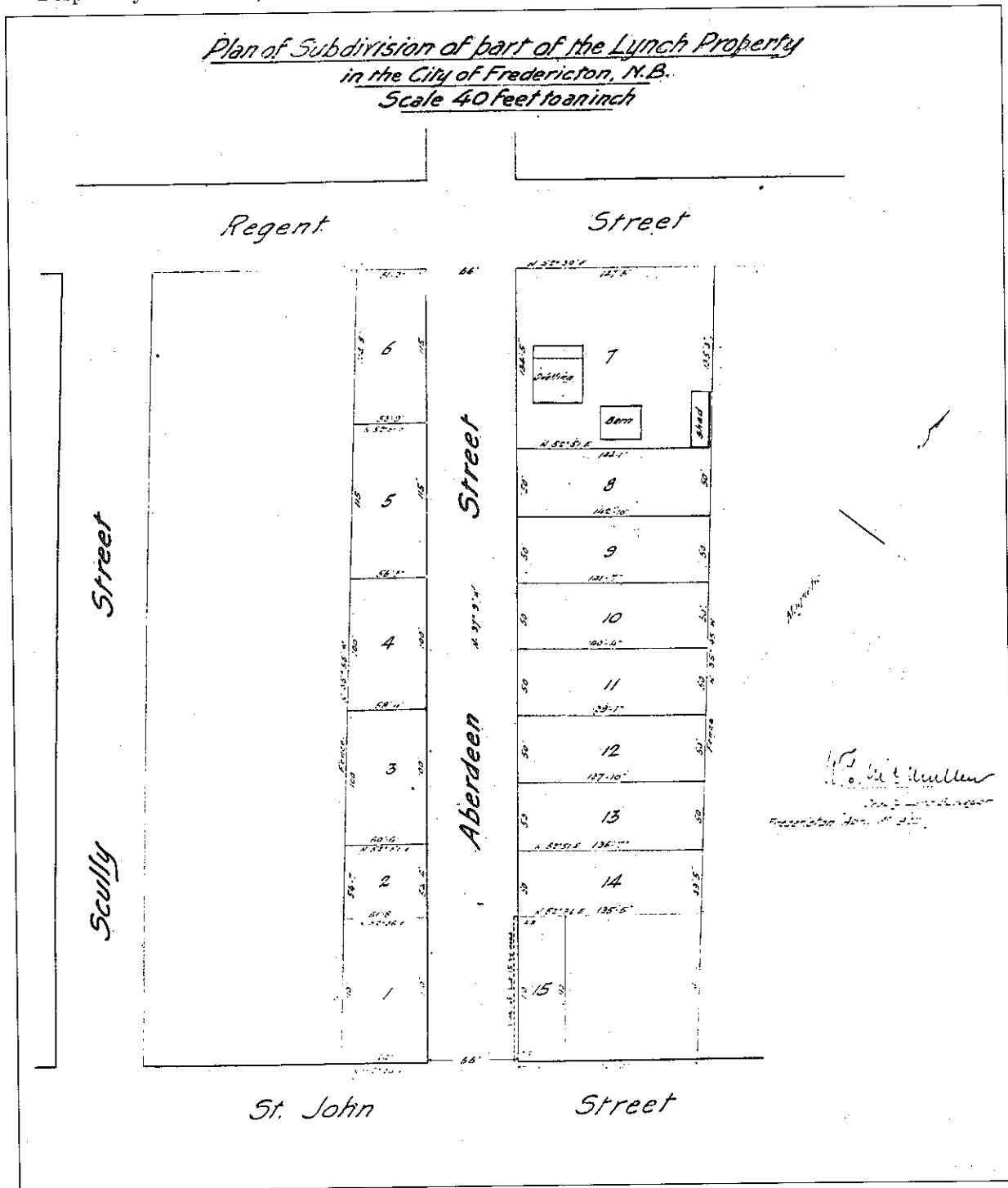
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