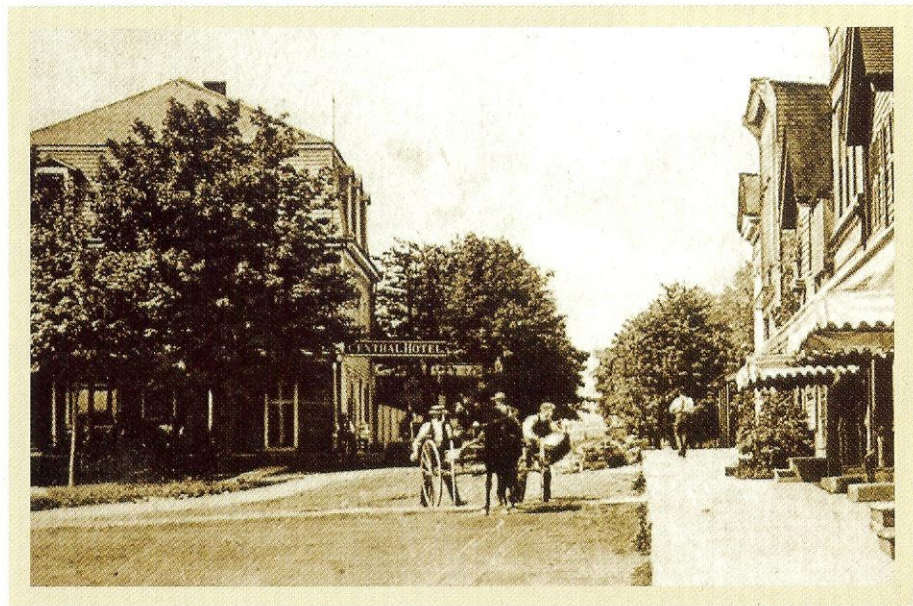


BY CHARITY VOGEL



**W**hen it comes to researching the past lives of your old house, it helps to remember one basic truth: You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Often, other people have already researched the same questions you have. And the information, if you can locate it, will likely save you time and labor in your own old-house odyssey. Don't be shy about taking advantage of this somewhat fortuitous extra help.



Start by finding any histories written up about your town, city or village over the years. If you live in a big city or moderately sized town, or if your community is histor-





be a common complaint, it doesn't have a one-size-fits-all answer. Patience, persistence and creativity can help, though.

For instance, don't just check for published books that were widely distributed. Try hunting down limited-issue brochures, fliers and old maps, as a starting point. With some luck, these may yield other published sources. Use the local library, and search both microfilm and printed material. If your small town has celebrated a big anniversary in the past—a centennial, sesquicentennial, or the like—there is often a corresponding commemorative history booklet. While a booklet of this nature is generally intended more as a souvenir than an historical document, it might be a potential route to some useful information.

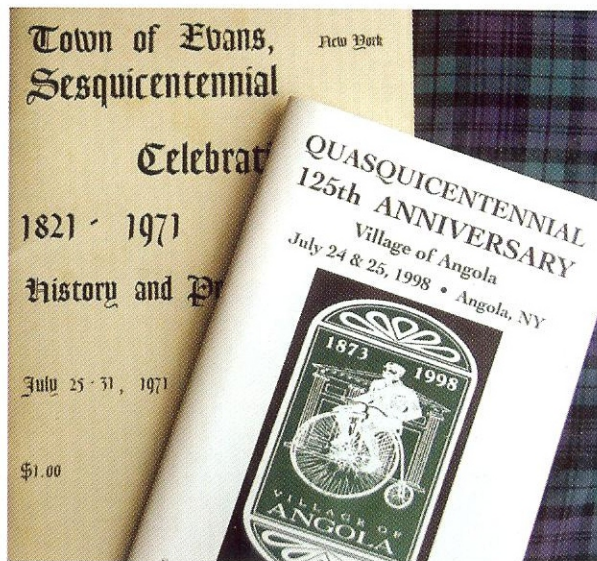
Diaries and journals kept by local residents, or scrapbooks and vintage photo collections are also worthy of exploration. These may be less than museum quality, but they can be very useful to you in your old-house research—more so than you might imagine. These types of documents were typically filled with local legends, as well as nitty-gritty details, and may include the names of forgotten people and places. You never know—you might just find your own historical quarry among them. And if something important happened in your house or on your land at some point, chances are you'll find some mention of it here—at least enough to whet your appetite.

Your local historical society is also a valid resource. Try your town or village society first.

Once you've gotten your bearings, branch out into any larger county or regional societies. Don't be afraid to ask questions—fellow researchers love to help a newbie out.

A quick anecdote about this sort of research: While searching for historical information about my own 1898 house, my husband and I used a hunt-and-peck method—that is, after we had already established the basic facts of our home's ownership (such as names, family relationships, and dates of ownership, which we obtained from the title, deed and census records). In our scavenging, we read a sesquicentennial history that had been written for our town by a local amateur historian, which we obtained through our town's modest historical society. In the end, checking these humble firsthand records helped us learn more about what this village was like at the time our house was built, as well as about our home in particular.

We discovered from an old history of our county that the little 19th-century railroad village (where our house stands) boasted a popular hotel near the train depot. The hotel's owner was none other than A.J. Watt, the brother of our home's original builder, Frank Watt, himself a railroad conductor and substantial citizen of the area. The Watt brothers



seemed to be two of the community's more prominent citizens, both of them linked to the railroads during the heyday of the Great American Age of Rail.

While that fact may seem small, it still made us feel intimately connected to our home's past. When you look for traces of your home's past, similar details will pop out at you, too.

In the process you may come across what others consider dusty books, but to you they will be treasure troves.

Be both illuminated and encouraged. ☘

Have you discovered a useful tip or technique that has helped you learn more about your historical home?

Or have you uncovered artifacts, characters or other unique elements of your home's past?

E-mail Charity Vogel at [angola-home@adelphia.net](mailto:angola-home@adelphia.net) or write to her at P.O. Box 102, Angola, NY 14006.