# How to Receive an OTPA Historical Plaque

Congratulations on being part of a select group of people that have a special affinity for historic homes here in Old Towne Orange.

Thank you for your interest in acquiring a historical plaque endorsed by The Old Towne Preservation Association (OTPA). However, prior to receiving your plaque, you must first do some research on your contributing home. There are a lot of details to research and review, so patience and perseverance are helpful tools. The payoff is that you will be rewarded with valuable insight and information about your home. If you have any trouble with the research, please contact OTPA at info@otpa.org and we'll work together to try and solve it. When emailing OTPA, please be sure to include the words "OTPA Plaque" in your email subject line.

**Plaque Cost** (as of 4/4/26 – Prices subject to change without notice. Please confirm pricing when ordering.)
OTPA Members - $310
Non-Members - $390

Once we place your order, it will take approximately 6-8 weeks for delivery. Payment is due and payable upon delivery. Checks should be made payable to OTPA.

**Plaque Style**
10" x 7" oval, bronze plaques, black finish, front mount.
Wording is typically:
Built for (name of original homeowner - at the top of the oval)
(Year the house was built - large lettering in the center)
Old Towne Preservation Association (at the bottom of the oval)

**OTPA Endorsement**
Your home must be located within the Orange Historic District and listed as a contributing structure in order for OTPA to endorse and place your plaque order. If you're not sure of the boundaries, or whether or not your home is contributing, you may visit our website at otpa.org and click on the link entitled "OTPA Home Page", scroll to the bottom of that page and click on the link entitled "Map of Old Towne Historic District". Or, you can email us at info@OTPA.org. You can also go onto the city's website, www.cityoforange.org, click on Planning, click on Historic Preservation and find additional research information available.

Unfortunately, OTPA cannot endorse a home that resides outside of the District. Reason being is that when a contributing home resides within the National Register Historic District of Old Towne Orange, the owner must comply with the standards set forth by the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation as well as The Old Towne Design Standards. While you may be a conscientious homeowner and want to retain the integrity of your historic structure, future owners may feel differently.

**Research Steps – Quick Overview**

Step 1 - Organizing yourself and gathering your home's legal description information
Step 2 - Orange Main Library: get names of people who lived at your address
Step 3 - Orange City Clerk: using names, locate tax rolls & find out when property value increased (i.e. when house was built)
Step 4 - Santa Ana Courthouse: locate original deed to your property (doesn't pinpoint when a house was constructed, though)*
Step 5 - You now have original owner's name and year of construction, and are ready to order

* You might not have to do Step 4 if you're lucky enough to have gotten the actual owner's name from the directories, although you might still want to so that you can have a copy of the original deed to your property.

*Ready to begin your research? Let's go!*

**Researching Your Home**

A notebook or journal in which to consolidate your findings will be very helpful.

**STEP 1** – Write down the following information and take it with you as you begin your research:

a) the exact legal description of your property from your escrow or property tax statement (this is not the parcel number);
b) the subdivision name (if any);
c) block letter and lot number.

*Example:* **Bonnie Brae Tract, Block B, Lot 6**

- The escrow statement and/or property tax statement usually state the year the house was built, however, this information may not be accurate. There have been cases in which the year stated on the property tax rolls is off by up to four years. Should you, in your research, discover that your home is not as old as you had thought, we encourage you, out of respect for historical accuracy, to list the correct year of your house on your plaque.

- In certain cases, accurate information simply may not be available or may not even exist. However, in most cases the information *is* available, and we believe you will derive a deeper satisfaction from acquiring a plaque for your home if you know every effort has been made to verify the year of construction and acquaint yourself with the original owner.

**STEP 2** – Go to Orange's Main Library on Chapman Ave. You need some names to work with — hopefully past names of the owners of your house.

- Go to the Orange Public Library located on Chapman Ave. between Shaffer & Center Streets to search through the Orange City Directories. These directories are similar to phone books, except without phone numbers since phones didn't exist way back when. The reference librarians will help you find the directory you need. Some of the directories are indexed by street address – "Householder Guides", some have kindly been cross-indexed (some haven't). Look for your street and house number. The people listed, however, may not be the original owner/builder, but this will give you some names to work with. If you have to, start with your own escrow statement and work backwards. It helps to have as many names as possible.

**STEP 3** – Once you are confident you now have the name(s) of actual owners of your home, i.e., those who would have paid the property taxes, you can now investigate using the Tax Assessment Books located at the Orange City Clerk's Office, Orange City Hall on Chapman Avenue.

- You **must make an appointment** to see the books. Call 714.744.5500. The books are located in "The Vault". They are by year, name of property owner, and identified with the legal description of your property as it reads on the escrow statement.

- A good indication of when a house was built on the vacant property will be when there is a substantial (substantial in 1910 could mean $500) increase under "Improvements". Bear in mind that the assessed value will probably not match the actual cost of the house. You should check the year prior, to make sure your house isn't older than stated on your records, and in the interest of accuracy.

**STEP 4** – Time to head over to the Santa Ana Courthouse, County Recorder's Office.
Note: This step is for hard-core research junkies.

- The County Record's Office is located in Building 12, Civic Center Plaza Dr., on the SW corner of Broadway & Civic Center Dr., NW corner of Santa Ana Blvd. and Ross

  St. Public parking is available off of Ross or Flower. Phone number: 714.834.2500

  <u>Room 106, Real Property Deeds.</u>

  This step may not be necessary. But a trip to the archives at the Old Courthouse should not be missed for anyone fascinated with the origins of Orange and the romance of living in a historic home.

- You may be able to save time by first looking for the earliest name you located at the library. *But remember, the deed has to have the same property description listed on your escrow papers*. Many original Orange residents owned multiple properties. If this doesn't yield a result fairly quickly, you will want to start working backwards in time from your escrow statement. The documents you want to look at are the Deeds (there are many other types of documents recorded), with the names of the "Grantee" = Buyer, and "Grantor" = Seller. When you have the Seller's name, you can then find their deed to get the name of the previous owner, and so on.

  Deeds prior to 1994 are on microfilm, organized by document number. You get the document number from the indexes, which are sorted by last name. Indexes are on computer back to 1982. Indexes from 1953-1969 and 1970-1981 are on microfiche cards in shoeboxes at the stand-alone microfiche machine (ask a clerk if you're not sure where to look). The middle document number is the microfilm "book" number and the last four digits are the page number. Indexes prior to 1953 with book and page numbers are recorded in very large books and are located in the back hallway of Room 101. 1909-1926: Alpha/Printout, 1927-1952: Handwritten, sort of Alpha. The microfilm cassettes are in tall cabinets over by the Real Property window in Room 106. Oldest deeds are on microfilm in short cabinets next to the Real Property window. You can have copies made from the microfilm for a small fee.

**STEP 5** – When the research is completed, please contact OTPA via email at info@otpa.org or leave a voice mail message on OTPA's hotline at 714.639.6840 and we'll get back to you for the details. We will then need 1-2 weeks to verify certain information. Once verified, your plaque order will be placed. Plaques may take up to 8 weeks for production.