



National Archives and Records Administration

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20408-0001

District of Columbia Building Permits, 1877–1949

The government of the District of Columbia began keeping building permits in 1877. The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has custody of DC building permits and associated indexes from February 17, 1877, to September 7, 1949. NARA has an index to building permits from September 8, 1949, through 1958, but permits issued after September 7, 1949, are in the custody of the District of Columbia Office of Public Records (DC Archives).

Index

___M1116, *District of Columbia Building Permits, 1877–1949, and Index, 1877–1958*. 1,465 rolls. DP. **Rolls 1–40** contain a three-part index arranged by 1) square and lot number; 2) subdivision; and 3) street address.

For the years 1877–1928, researchers need to know the property’s square and lot number to find the permit number on the index. If you do not know the square or lot, you can find that information on the property deed or a recent assessment; check the Baist maps at the Martin Luther King Library, Washingtoniana Room; or contact the District of Columbia’s Recorder of Deeds Office.

For permits after 1928, use the street address to find the building permit number.

Building Permits, 1877–September 7, 1949

The records consist of applications for permits and permits issued for private construction, including those for new construction; repairs to existing structures, and erecting of fences and signs; razing of buildings; installing motors, engines, boilers, machinery, or elevators; and excavation. The records usually provide the owner’s name, location of the construction, name and address of the architect and builder, cost estimates, and details concerning the nature of the work and the materials used.

Permit Numbering Systems

Between 1877 and June 1928, the DC government issued building permits in numerical sequence beginning with a new sequence at the beginning of each fiscal year; fiscal years began in July and ended the following June. Beginning on July 2, 1928, the DC government issued building permits in numerical order and did not start over again with the change of a fiscal year. The last permit issued in fiscal year 1928 was number 9802, and the first permit issued on July 2, 1928, was number 115360.

Maps, Blueprints, and Architectural Drawings

The building permits in NARA’s custody contain some maps, blueprints, and architectural drawings, which are located at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland. These are reproduced along with the building permits on M1116.

For the years 1904–1915, NARA has some oversized maps, blueprints, and architectural drawings. In the file on M1116, there is a sheet indicating if these records were part of the file. M1116 contains some references to a “Plan File,” which no longer exists.

Building Permits Issued after September 7, 1949

Although M1116 includes an index to building permits issued from 1950 to 1958, all permits dated from September 7, 1949, through June 1962 are in the custody of the District of Columbia Office of Public Records (DC Archives).

Permits issued after June 1962 are in the custody of the District of Columbia Government Office of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, Permit Records.

Note on M1116 Roll Numbers

Both the National Archives and the DC government microfilmed the DC building permits. As a result, the rolls of microfilm in M1116 are not numbered in a straight numerical sequence.

The National Archives filmed the permits dated 1877 through June 30, 1915, on 35 mm microfilm. These rolls are numbered 1–854. The DC government filmed the permits dated July 1, 1915, through September 7, 1949, on 16 mm microfilm while those permits were still in its custody; it transferred the rolls of 16 mm film to the National Archives and destroyed the originals. These 16 mm rolls are numbered 133–814.

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