

# RESEARCH IN LAND RECORDS

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Land records are often overlooked by genealogists. It is estimated that 90 percent of white males owned land before 1850 making it one of the most important genealogical sources for genealogists. Land records in America date back to the early 1600's, and barring records destruction, every name is indexed in a grantor or grantee deed index.

Land records often state kinship connections. They also place individuals in a specific place and time. Land records offer researchers the ability to sort people and families into neighborhoods and closely related groups which may reveal more family ties, or prior place of residence.

The Family History Library has microfilmed land records throughout the U. S., and some of those are now available online at FamilySearch.org. If the digitized copies of the microfilm aren't online, rolls can be ordered from the FHL in Salt Lake City in to your local Family History Center. Ancestry.com also has a few deed collections among its databases.

William Dollarhide wrote an excellent article in 1995 about the importance of land records in genealogical research titled: *Retracing the Trails of Your Ancestors Using Deed Records*. Although dated, his discussion is as valid today as it was then. <http://www.directlinesoftware.com/deeds.htm>

## STATE-LAND STATES & PUBLIC DOMAIN STATES

The U. S. uses two different survey methods. State-Land states use Metes and Bounds, and Public Domain States use the Township and Range system.

- Understanding Metes and Bounds System:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metes\\_and\\_bounds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metes_and_bounds)

## TOOLS TO PLAT METES AND BOUNDS PARCELS

- Platting Metes and Bounds Land  
<http://www.genealogytools.net/deeds>
- Deed Platter  
<http://www.genealogytools.net/deeds/>
- Plat Plotter  
[http://platplotter.appspot.com/lib/pp\\_about.html#.ViXRSX6rTbh](http://platplotter.appspot.com/lib/pp_about.html#.ViXRSX6rTbh)

The Federal Government began conveying public land to individuals in 1820, and continues to the present day. There are 30 Public Land states. The Bureau of Land Management has published land patents online and, in some cases, the original surveys as early as 1810 may also be found. New records are added as time goes on.

- Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office: [www.glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx](http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx)  
Search for individuals by state.
- An informative article about the Public Land System by the U. S. Geological Survey:  
[http://nationalmap.gov/small\\_scale/a\\_plss.html](http://nationalmap.gov/small_scale/a_plss.html)

A descriptive article about National Archives Record Group 49 – Research in Land Entry Files:  
<http://www.archives.gov/publications/ref-info-papers/rip114.pdf>

Land Entry Files can be ordered through NARA: Use NTF Order Form 84:  
<http://www.archives.gov/contact/inquire-form.html>

## DEED RECORDS

Deeds were written up by individuals, an attorney or a local official. The deed was then transcribed into the deed books at the local recorder's office. Not all deeds recorded real property transactions. Slave sales can be found in deed records, as can some early marriage records. Grantor (seller) and Grantee (buyer) indexes are available for deed books. Grantor indexes are sometimes referred to as Direct, and Grantee indexes as Indirect. There are many indexing systems, some logical and others very confusing. The most common system is the Running Index which is arranged alphabetically by oldest filing date. The Cumulative Index groups a series of years such as 1699-1800. The Cott System organizes entries by the first three letters of the surname such as Beh-Bod. The Grantor and Grantee index books often explain the system used within.

Colonial New England - Initial grants were made by the British Crown, and are available at the town level. Locating New England deeds during the colonial years is complicated. For a good overview see: *Researching Your Colonial New England Ancestors* by Patricia Law Hatcher.

FamilySearch.org and Ancestry.com have placed some digital deed collections online as have a few states such as Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Texas. To find more digitized land records conduct a Google search using the term "Georgia (any state) land records online."

The Family History Library has microfilmed a large portion of original deed records throughout the U. S. Some of these microfilms are available online at FamilySearch.org, and others can be borrowed from Salt Lake. To begin land research check the Grantee and Grantor Deed Indexes where your family lived to locate deeds they recorded with officials. The two deed index worksheets below will help you record information you find.

- Grantee Deed Index Form: <http://www.familytreemagazine.com/upload/images/pdf/grantees.pdf>
- Grantor Deed Index Form: <http://www.familytreemagazine.com/upload/images/pdf/grantors.pdf>

## ***The American State Papers: Public Land Series 1789-1837***

Of particular interest to genealogists are the eight volumes of public land claims dating from 1789-1837. After the end of the Revolutionary War, the federal government was faced with huge debt. To reduce its debt burden, Congress opted to establish and sell land that had been ceded by foreign governments such as Spain, France, Britain, and Mexico. Before the western lands could be sold, the government had to determine which lands were legally in private hands. Boards of Commissioners were set up to adjudicate these land claims, and each claim generated case files documenting 80,000+ individuals.

Each volume of the *Public Land Series* contains a "limited" index. In 1972 Phillip W. McMullin created a complete name index to the nine volumes comprising Class VIII (Public Lands) and Class IX (Claims) titled *Grassroots of America; A Computerized Index to the American State Papers: Land Grants and Claims 1789-1837 with Other Aids to Research* (Salt Lake City: Gendex Corporation, 1972). An online version available through local Family History Centers.

More recently, Hathi Trust has digitized the entire 38-volume set of *The American State Papers*, making volumes available for either full view or download. Genealogists can now easily search the text of individual *Public Lands* volumes for the names of their ancestors. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009727010>

### **MILITARY BOUNTY LAND**

The Federal Government awarded Military Bounty Land to its veterans from 1788 primarily to 1855. Some applications were received as late as 1960. Veteran's widows could apply for land based on their deceased husband's military service. [https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/US\\_Military\\_Bounty\\_Land\\_Warrants](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/US_Military_Bounty_Land_Warrants)  
The laws governing Bounty Land changed often, so it is advisable to read about laws that were in effect during the time periods in which your veteran may have applied for a grant.

Many War of 1812 bounty land papers are interfiled among a veteran's pension records. Others may need to be ordered from the National Archives.

For an excellent overview of the Bounty Land laws and records see:  
[https://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=Military\\_Bound\\_Land](https://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=Military_Bound_Land)

National Archives descriptive summary of the Bounty Land records:  
<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/bounty-land-1775-1855.pdf>

Bounty Land Warrant Files can be ordered through the National Archives: Form 84C [www.archives.gov/forms](http://www.archives.gov/forms)

### **County Boundary Changes**

County boundaries changed often over the centuries as new counties were created. It is vitally important to check a county's boundary when you establish where an ancestor once lived. A state collection of free animated county boundary maps is available from: <http://www.mapofus.org/>

## Mortgages

As is the case today, mortgages were very common in America's history. Some counties actually had Loan Offices from which individuals could borrow money against their land holdings. The mortgage document set the interest rate, the terms, and provided a detailed description of the land. Lenders were often relatives, and they may offer clues to family connections not otherwise disclosed. Mortgages are indexed like deed records with Mortgagor indexes (those providing the loan), and Mortgagee indexes (borrowers).

## Legal Terms Used in Deed Records

- <http://www.directlinesoftware.com/legal.htm>

## Transcription Software Programs

Transcript 2.5.0: A program developed by Jacob Boerema of Holland. The free version has handy tools that allow easy transcription of any written document. There are free and Pro versions available. Windows or MacBook Air running Crossover.

Free version: <http://www.jacobboerema.nl/Transcript/Freeware.htm>

Genscriber: Documents can be transcribed in a word processor style, or in a spreadsheet type grid where facts can be easily be recorded. It is available for Windows or Mac computers. Free!

<http://www.genscriber.com/genapps>

Read a review of Genscriber by Dick Eastman:

<http://blog.eogn.com/2014/12/16/genscriber-a-free-transcription-tool-for-genealogy-research>

## Further Reading

E. Wade Hone, *Land and Property Research in the United States* (Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1997)

Loretto Dennis Szucs, Sandra Hargraves Luebking, ed.. *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy*.

(Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 1998)

[http://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy#The Source Online](http://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=The_Source:_A_Guidebook_to_American_Genealogy#The_Source_Online)

Linklater, Andro, *Measuring America: How an Untamed Wilderness Shaped the United States and Fulfilled the Promise of Democracy*. (U. S.: Walker Publishing, Inc., 2002)

Oberly, James W., *Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and the Public Lands before the Civil War*.

(Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990)

Land Research: FamilySearch Wiki

[https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Land\\_Transactions\\_Person\\_to\\_Person#Tip\\_1\\_.What\\_are\\_the\\_various\\_kinds\\_of\\_land\\_records\\_indexes.3F](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_Land_Transactions_Person_to_Person#Tip_1_.What_are_the_various_kinds_of_land_records_indexes.3F)