Researching Local Land Records

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A. What are local land records?

This topic includes many document types recorded at the local level, often involving multiple parties.

- 1. Deed or Indenture transfer of property, usually land
 - a. One party to another
 - b. Multiple parties
 - o sometimes fractional portions or percentages
- 2. Mortgage or Deed of Trust money owed for property
- 3. Easement, Right of Way e.g. roadway
- 4. Patent, Homestead transfer from government agency
- 5. Affidavits e.g. joint tenant, heirship
- 6. Estate Distribution court document showing distribution to heirs
- 7. Eminent Domain or Condemnation for public projects e.g. dams, highways and many more

B. When are local land records filed?

- 1. Records begin with the establishment of a local entity, such as county or town
- 2. If boundary lines changed:
 - a. Check records in parent county
 - b. Check for transcribed records in newly formed county
- 3. Check the following sources for general information:
 - a. Ancestry's *Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, print & online version California example: http://www.ancestry.com/wiki/index.php?title=California County Resources
 - o county formation dates
 - b. FamilySearch Wiki

Georgia example: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Georgia,_United_States_Genealogy

- o boundary changes
- clickable map to county info
- c. *Google* search for area of interest, e.g. "deeds williamson county texas" Texas example: http://eagle.wilco.org/williamsonweb/ 'Armstrong James'
- d. Research guides or books, e.g. New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer[1]

C. Where can you research local land records? Examples:

- 1. Onsite, in person
 - a. Office where the records were originally filed, e.g. Santa Cruz Recorder, Ocean St.
 - b. Local archives with original records, e.g. Santa Clara County Archives, by appointment https://www.sccgov.org/sites/archives/about/location-hours/Pages/Location-and-Hours.aspx
 - c. Local archives with microfilm records, e.g. King County Archives, WA > link to 'Indexes...'
 - o https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/records-licensing/archives/research-guides/recordings.aspx
- 2. Online, search catalogs of local libraries to find books
 - a. Abstracted records, e.g. Charles County, Maryland, land records, 1743-1752^[2]
- 3. Online, search for collections at state and local archives
 - a. Boone County, Arkansas: http://archives.arkansas.gov/research/search-records.aspx
- 4. Online, government sites, indexes and some images
 - a. Shelby County, Tennessee: database/images from 1812 http://register.shelby.tn.us/index.php
 - b. Maricopa County, Arizona: database/images, 1871-1946, 1947-present https://recorder.maricopa.gov/recdocdata/

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¹ Book available at SCPL downtown, N.Y. 142

² SCPL downtown, Mary 55 (Miami Beach, Fla: T.L.C Genealogy, 1993)

D. What kind of information can you find in local land records?

Examples with a computer index/database and images:

1. Deed, Maricopa County, Arizona (online index & images @ official's site)

First, search database for name, year 1872 https://recorder.maricopa.gov/recdocdata/

- then select document from results list & view
- a. wife's name
- b. date
- c. where they were living at the time
- d. amount of sale
- e. property description
- f. other
- 2. Affidavit of Heirship, Shelby County, Tennessee (online index and images @ official's site)

First, search database for name http://register.shelby.tn.us/index.php

- then select name from results list
- then select document from results list & view
- a. wife's name
- b. date of death
- c. names of children
- d. where they were living at the time
- e. property description

The following examples do not have an online database; instead look at the handwritten index.

3. Deed, Irwin County, Georgia (online @ FamilySearch.org)

https://www.familysearch.org/catalog/search

First, locate index in Card Catalog i.e. 'Georgia, Irwin' > 'Land and property'

- search the Grantor index by alpha section (may need to go page by page)
- note the book and page numbers of interest (see numbers in the crease of book)
- find the book and page and view document
- a. relationship
- b. type of property (hint: not real property)
- c. where the property was located
- d. date of document
- e. date of recording (different/later)
- f. other (name not as indexed)
- 4. Deed, Rutland County, Vermont (index online @ FamilySearch.org)

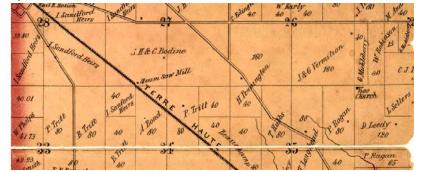
First, locate index in Card Catalog (link above) i.e. 'Vermont, Rutland' > 'Land and property'

- search the Grantor index by the alpha section (may need to go page by page)
- locate book and page
- order document and view (received from Vermont state archives)
- a. relationship
- b. where grantors were living at the time
- c. where the property was located
- d. date of document (later)
- 5. Indenture, Santa Clara County, California (onsite @ Recorder's office)

First, search Deed Grantor index on Digital Reel @ computer station in public area

- locate book and page
- go to Book, find page and view
- a. relationship
- b. former name and married name of woman
- c. name of husband

- E. How do we know to look for local land records? Always check!
 - 1. Common misconception: "My ancestors did not own land."
 - a. May have received it from an estate, sold it the same day and headed west
 - b. May have lost property due to non-payment of taxes, i.e. Sheriff's sale
 - c. May have been a lawsuit re. land claims, e.g. Ohio land ownership problems
 - d. May have been personal property e.g. stock animals
- F. Where to look for clues, exercises
 - 1. Maps
 - a. Indiana State Library map collection http://www.in.gov/library/2533.htm
 - o Example, Vigo County http://www.in.gov/library/2533.htm (link to Library of Congress)
 - o Analyze map for ownership and landmarks shown
 - names/acreage
 - heirs
 - mill
 - railroad
 - church
 - waterways
 - roads
 - Q. What are the bold numbers, 28, 27, 26 etc?



- o Possible further research in federal land records https://glorecords.blm.gov/search/
- 2. U.S. census records, 1850 forward
 - a. Amount of real and personal property shown (check column headings)
 - o Example, 1860, Henry Pennington and neighbors (*Ancestry.com*)
 - Q. Can we correlate the information from these 2 sources? (map and census)
- 3. Newspapers e.g. legal notices, obituaries
 - a. California Digital Newspaper Collection https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc
 - Example: keyword 'partition' limit to Nov Dec 1852 > results: 'late Jonathan Chetwood'
 court order to divide property
- 4. Local Histories
 - a. Santa Clara City Library http://santaclaraca.gov/government/departments/library
 - Example: "county history" ohio > 2 results (search term in quotes)
 - Also get library card https://sccl.santaclaraca.gov/selfreg~S0 (application for card)
 - access HeritageQuest from your computer/device
 http://santaclaraca.gov/government/departments/library/research-resources

then, Research tools then, 'Genealogy and Local History' (card issued in person)

- 5. Local court records, probate and civil (lawsuits)
 - a. Probate records usually involve inheritance or interest in land
 - Example: Missouri Digital Heritage 'Clark, George', 1888 https://s1.sos.mo.gov/records/archives/archives/archives/db/judicialrecords/Default.aspx

General Sources: Books available at Santa Cruz Public Library

- Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources, 929 44
- Courthouse Research for Family Historians, by Christine Rose, CG[®], 929 102
- Land & Property Research in the United States, by E. Wade Hone, Heritage Consulting, 929 81