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
         o county formation dates
      b. FamilySearch Wiki
         Georgia example: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Georgia,_United_States_Genealogy
         o boundary changes
         o 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…’
   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
   4. Online, government sites, indexes and some images
         https://recorder.maricopa.gov/reedocdata/

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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/](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)
   - 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](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

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E. How do we know to look for local land records? - Always check!
   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
      o Example: keyword ‘partition’ limit to Nov Dec 1852 > results: ‘late Jonathan Chetwood’
        - court order to divide property

4. Local Histories
      o Example: “county history” ohio > 2 results (search term in quotes)
      o Also get library card https://scl.santaclaraca.gov/selfreq~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
      o Example: Missouri Digital Heritage ‘Clark, George’, 1888

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

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