

LAND RECORDS

Clues That There Might Be Land Records

Census

Census records from 1850, 1860, and 1870 had a column that indicated that there was value of land.

Additionally, in 1910, 1920, and in 1930, census records had a question about whether they were renting or owning a home.

These are indications that there might be land records to find.

Wills & Probate

While not exclusively land records, probate records often mention real estate and land ownership. Wills, estate inventories, and property distribution records can provide details about land owned by your ancestors and the transfer of ownership after their deaths.

If someone had a will, most of the time there is land involved. Often in wills or probate packages, you might find land descriptions which is an indication that there could be more land records to find.

are not to be asked in respect to infants. Inquiries numbered 11, merely by an affirmative mark, as /.

(township), in the County
on the 6 day of August, 1870.

Occupation, each person, male, female.	VALUE OF REAL ESTATE OWNED.		Place of Birth, naming State or Territory of U. S.; or the Country, if of foreign birth.	PART of foreign birth.
	Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.		
	8	9	10	11
	100	150	of Carolina	
	300	175	"	

Property Tax Records

Property tax records can help track the ownership of land over time. They often include the names of landowners, the assessed value of the property, and the amount of tax owed. These records can reveal changes in ownership and sometimes provide insights into the economic status of your ancestors.

Newspapers

Many times, when a person was purchasing land, going through foreclosure, or anything that required the bank or court to make an official notice in the paper, you may find small newspaper announcements of the intent to transfer property. These too are clues that there are land records to find.



Types of Land Records

When conducting genealogical research, there are several types of land records that can provide valuable information about your ancestors. These records often document the ownership, transfer, and use of land over time. Here are some specific types of land records commonly used in genealogical research:

Land Grants

Land grants were often issued by governments to individuals or groups as a reward for military service, colonization efforts, or other reasons. These grants provide information about the land recipient and may include details about the conditions of the grant.

Deeds

Deeds are legal documents that transfer the ownership of land from one party to another. They typically include the names of the grantor (seller) and grantee (buyer), a description of the property, and details of the transaction. Deeds can help trace the chain of ownership and identify familial relationships.

Family historians can find deeds in various places depending on the jurisdiction and time period. Here are some common sources to locate deed records:

1. County Recorder's Office:

Deeds are typically recorded at the county level in the United States. Visit the county recorder's office in the county where the land was located. They maintain records of land transactions, including deeds, and often provide public access to these records. Some recorder offices may have online databases, while others may require an in-person visit or written requests.

2. County Clerk's Office: In some states, land records may be kept by the county clerk's office instead of the recorder's office. Check with the county clerk to determine where land records are maintained and how to access them.

3. State Archives: State archives or historical societies may hold copies of older land records, including deeds. These institutions preserve historical documents and can be a valuable resource for genealogical research. Check the website or contact the state archives or historical society to inquire about the availability of land records.

4. Online Databases: Several online platforms and websites provide access to digitized land records, including deeds. Websites such as FamilySearch, Ancestry.com, and Fold3 have

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA—Randolph County. 293

THIS DEED, made this the 12th day of July, 1898, by
 H. H. Kenley and wife Nannie W. Kenley
 of Randolph County and State of North Carolina, of the first part, to
 J. C. Swanson,
 of Randolph County and State of North Carolina, of the second part:

WITNESSETH, That said H. H. Kenley and Nannie W. Kenley, in consideration of
 Twenty Hundred and fifty Dollars, to them paid by
 J. C. Swanson, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, have
 bargained and sold, and by these presents do hereby bargain, sell and convey to said
 J. C. Swanson, and his
 heirs, a certain tract or parcel of land in Randolph
 County, State of North Carolina, adjoining the lands of J. N. Davis and W. P. Pickett
 and others, bounded as follows, viz: Beginning at a stake on the fulling mill road
 thence south 20° west down the same forty one chains & fifty links
 to a rock; thence south four chains to a cedar; thence north
 85° west 21 chains and 50 links to a stake on the creek; thence
 N. 89° west 20 chains to a stake; thence S. 33° E. 11 chains to a corner to
 north; thence N. 33° E. up B. L. to a corner to the old line between J. N. Davis
 and J. C. Swanson; thence S. 35° E. to a black walnut on the bank of B. L.; thence
 north 23° E. 11 chains & 75 links to a corner; thence south 75° E.
 11 chains & 25 links to a Post oak; thence north 33° E. 11 chains & 25 links
 to a stake; thence S. 33° E. 11 chains & 25 links to a stake
 east along the said road ten chains to the Beginning
 containing One Hundred acres more or less.

To HAVE AND TO HOLD the aforesaid tract or parcel of land, and all privileges and appurtenances thereto belonging, to the said
 J. C. Swanson,
 his heirs and assigns, to their only use and behoof forever.

And the said H. H. Kenley and Nannie W. Kenley covenant with said J. C. Swanson
 heirs and assigns, that they and their heirs shall and lawfully shall convey the same in fee simple; that the same are free
 and clear from all incumbrances, and that they will warrant and defend the said title to the same against the claims of all persons whomsoever.

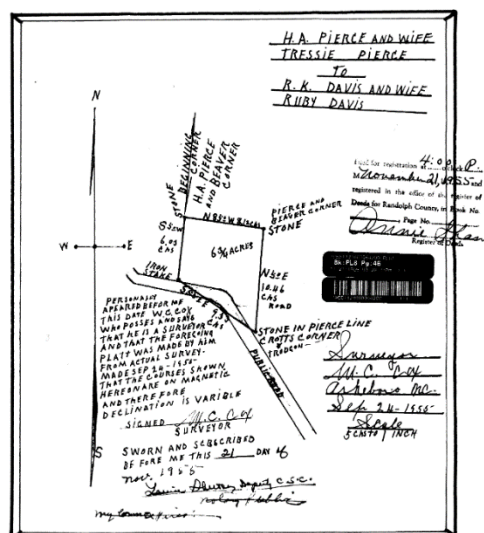
IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, The said H. H. Kenley and Nannie W. Kenley have hereunto set
 their hand and seal the day and year above written. H. H. Kenley (SEAL)

collections of land records that can be searched and accessed with a subscription or at a local library that provides access to these services. Additionally, some county recorder's offices may offer online databases or indexes for land records.

5. Local Libraries: Local libraries, especially those located in the area where your ancestors lived, may have microfilm or digital copies of land records, including deeds. Consult the library's catalog or speak with the reference librarian to identify if they have land records in their collection.
6. Family History Centers: Family History Centers operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) provide access to genealogical resources, including microfilm and digital records and may have records found no where else.
7. Private Collections: In some cases, private individuals or organizations may possess copies of land records, including deeds. These collections could be available through local historical societies, genealogical societies, or private repositories. Consulting with local historians or genealogical groups in the area where your ancestors lived might help identify such resources.

Plat Maps and Surveys

Plat maps and surveys depict the boundaries, dimensions, and geographic features of land. They can be valuable for identifying specific parcels of land owned by your ancestors and understanding the surrounding area. Plat maps may also show the names of neighboring landowners, which can be useful for identifying potential relatives.



1 RANDROD.COM

Homestead Records

Homestead records pertain to the Homestead Acts that allowed individuals to claim and settle public land. These records contain information about the applicant, including their name, age, occupation, and sometimes details about their family. Homestead records can provide insights into your ancestors' migration patterns and socioeconomic circumstances.

Types of Homestead Records You Might Find

- An application
- Fulfillment of requirements
- Final Papers
- Affidavit from Neighbors
- Naturalization papers
- Proof of military service



2 LOC.GOV

Remember, Homestead Records can provide valuable details about your ancestors, including names, dates, locations, and sometimes even personal narratives. However, keep in mind that not all homestead applications were successful, and records might vary in content and availability. Persistence and thoroughness in your research approach will increase the chances of locating your ancestor's Homestead Records.

Under the Homestead Act, which was signed into law in 1862, several states were eligible for homesteading. The act allowed individuals to acquire up to 160 acres of public land for a small fee, provided they met certain requirements such as improving the land and residing on it for a specified period. Here are the states that were eligible for homesteading under the act until it ended in 1986:

Alabama	Iowa	New Mexico
Alaska	Kansas	North Dakota
Arizona	Louisiana	Ohio
Arkansas	Michigan	Oklahoma
California	Minnesota	Oregon
Colorado	Mississippi	South Dakota
Florida	Missouri	Utah
Idaho	Montana	Washington
Illinois	Nebraska	Wisconsin
Indiana	Nevada	Wyoming

It's important to note that while these states were eligible for homesteading, not all available public lands in these states were open for homesteading. Some areas, such as national parks, Indian reservations, and military reservations, were excluded from homesteading. Additionally, the availability of land for homesteading varied over time as land was settled and acquired by other means.

Mortgages and Liens

Mortgage and lien records can reveal financial transactions related to land. They document loans or debts secured by property and provide information about the lender, borrower, and the terms of the agreement. These records can offer clues about your ancestors' financial situations and potential relationships with lenders.

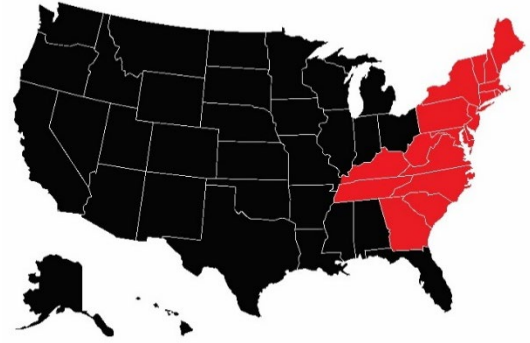
State Land States

State Land states used Metes & Bounds as a way of describing land in deeds, maps, wills, banking documents, and more.

Metes & Bounds

“Originating from English common law, the metes and bounds survey method is centuries old, and was the primary method used in the United States prior to the Land Act of 1785.”¹

“Prior to the Revolutionary War, when land was surveyed, the “metes and bounds” system was used to define boundaries. The system is still in existence today for land which was acquired before the present system of surveying land was adopted.”²



Metes and Bounds is a system of describing property boundaries by specifying distances and angles. It was commonly used in early American land surveys, particularly in states that were settled before the adoption of the Public Land Survey System (PLSS). Several states used the metes and bounds method for describing property boundaries. Here are some states known to have used the metes and bounds system.

The State Land States are the U.S. states where the state government originally retained ownership of the land within their boundaries. These states were not created from the public domain and did not go through the process of federal land ownership and distribution. The State Land States are:

Connecticut	New York
Delaware	North Carolina
Georgia	Pennsylvania
Hawaii	Rhode Island
Kentucky	South Carolina
Maine	Tennessee
Maryland	Texas
Massachusetts	Vermont
New Hampshire	Virginia
New Jersey	West Virginia

¹ <https://study.com/learn/lesson/metes-bounds-survey-system-example.html#:~:text=Originating%20from%20English%20common%20law,the%20Land%20Act%20of%201785.>

² https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Metes_and_Bounds#:~:text=7%20References-Introduction,of%20surveying%20land%20was%20adopted.

These states were either original colonies or were formed from territories that had already established land ownership under colonial or state jurisdiction. The land within these states was typically granted or sold by the state government to individuals, entities, or organizations. It's important to note that even though these states initially retained land ownership, there may still be federal land holdings within their boundaries, such as national parks, military bases, or other federal installations.

Regarding the time period, the use of the metes and bounds system varied depending on the state and the timing of settlement. In general, the metes and bounds system was commonly employed during the colonial period and throughout the early decades of the United States.

Over time, some states transitioned from metes and bounds to the **Public Land Survey System** PLSS, while others continued to use metes and bounds alongside the PLSS or other surveying systems. The specific timeline of this transition can vary by state and region.

Measurements by Metes & Bounds

In the metes and bounds method of land surveying, land parcels are described by using a combination of distances and directions. Here are the common measurements used in metes and bounds and their equivalents in today's measurements:

Chains: A chain is a unit of measurement used in metes and bounds. One chain is equal to 66 feet or 20.1168 meters.

Links: A link is a fraction of a chain. There are 100 links in a chain, and each link is equal to 0.66 feet or 0.201168 meters.

Rods: A rod is another measurement used in metes and bounds. One rod is equal to 16.5 feet or 5.0292 meters. There are four rods in a chain.

Perches: A perch is another term for a rod, and the two terms are often used interchangeably.

Poles: A pole is yet another term for a rod, and it is commonly used in metes and bounds descriptions.

Furlongs: A furlong is a unit of distance equal to 660 feet or 201.168 meters. There are 10 chains or 40 rods in a furlong.

Other Terms and Abbreviation's Found in Land Records

Here is a detailed definition of terms commonly found in land records:

1. **Abstract of Title:** An abstract of title is a summary or condensed history of the chain of title for a property. It typically includes information on all recorded documents, such as deeds, mortgages, liens, and encumbrances affecting the property.
2. **Adverse Possession:** Adverse possession is a legal doctrine that allows someone who has openly and continuously occupied and used another person's property without permission to claim ownership over time.
3. **B.O.** – Black Oak
4. **C.B. or C.C.** – Chain Bearer or Chain Carrier

5. **Chain of Title:** The chain of title is a chronological list of all the owners of a property over time, as documented in land records. It traces the transfers of ownership and helps establish a clear and unbroken line of ownership.
6. **Deed:** A deed is a legal document that transfers ownership of land or property from one party (grantor) to another (grantee). It contains a description of the property, identifies the parties involved, and outlines the terms and conditions of the transfer.
7. **Dower or Dower Rights** – Dower rights were the right of women to stay and live on her husband’s land for the rest of “her natural life.” This was typically 1/3 of her husband’s land in a time when women could not own land of their own (if married). Laws differ from place to place and time. Check the history of the area you are researching.
8. **Easement:** An easement is a legal right that allows someone else to use or access a portion of another person's property. Common types of easements include rights of way for utilities or access to a neighboring property.
9. **Encumbrance:** An encumbrance is a claim, lien, or restriction on a property that affects its ownership or use. Examples include mortgages, liens, easements, and restrictive covenants.
10. **Grantor:** Person selling land. The grantor is the person or entity who is transferring ownership of the property through a deed. They are often the current owner of the property.
11. **Grantee:** Person buying land. The grantee is the person or entity who is receiving ownership of the property through a deed. They are the intended new owner.
12. **Lien:** A lien is a legal claim or right against a property as security for a debt or obligation. It can be placed on a property by a creditor or through a court order.
13. **Meander:** Typically described following a river or creek.
14. **Metes and Bounds:** Metes and bounds is a land survey system that uses physical measurements (Title: Title refers to legal ownership and rights to a property. Land records provide information on the chain of title, which shows the history of ownership transfers for a particular property.
15. **Mortgage:** A mortgage is a loan secured by real estate. It gives the lender (mortgagee) the right to take possession of the property if the borrower (mortgagor) fails to repay the loan according to the agreed terms.
16. **On the Waters of...:** Does not mean on the banks of a body of water necessarily, it means on the watershed of a body of water.
17. **Plat:** Map of the property.
18. **Plat Book:** A plat book is a collection of plats or maps that show the layout and divisions of land within a specific geographic area, often organized by township, range, and section numbers.
19. **P.O.:** Post Oak
20. **R.O.:** Red Oak
21. **S.C.C.:** Sworn Chain Carrier
22. **S.O.:** Spanish Oak
23. **Survey:** A survey is a professional measurement and mapping of a property's boundaries, dimensions, and features. A survey is often conducted by a licensed surveyor and is used to create an accurate representation of the property.
24. **Plat:** A plat is a detailed map or survey drawing that shows the boundaries, dimensions, and features of a specific property or subdivision. It often includes information on lot numbers, streets, and other relevant details.

25. **Quitclaim Deed:** A quitclaim deed is a type of deed that transfers whatever interest or claim a grantor may have in a property without providing any warranties or guarantees of ownership.
26. **W.O.:** White Oak.

Mapping from Descriptions

Drawing a land description based on a Metes and Bounds description involves following a series of steps to accurately represent the boundaries and features of the described property.

Tools Needed

1. **Protractor:** A protractor is useful for measuring and drawing angles accurately. It helps you plot the specified directions or bearings at each boundary point.
2. **Graph Paper or Map:** Use graph paper to map of the area to create a scaled representation of the property. The paper should have a grid or scale that corresponds to the units of measurement in the land description (e.g., feet, meters).
3. **Pencil, Eraser, and Sharpener:** Use a pencil for drawing and plotting the land description. It allows you to adjust and make corrections easily. Keep an eraser handy to remove any errors or changes. A sharpener ensures that you always have a sharp pencil point for accurate plotting.
4. **Ruler:** A ruler or scale is essential for drawing straight lines and measuring distances on the graph paper or map. Choose a ruler with precise markings or a scale that matches the units of measurement in the land description.

Here are the general steps to draw a land description using the Metes and Bounds method:

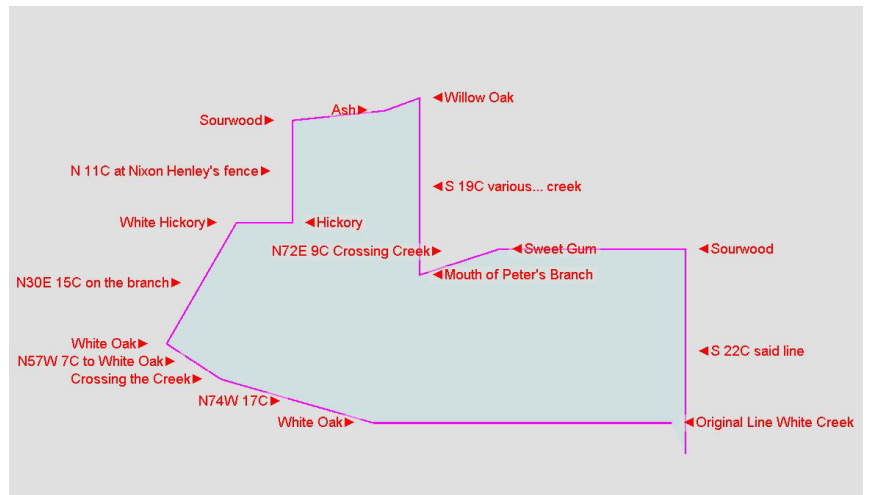
1. **Obtain the Metes and Bounds Description:** Start by obtaining the written Metes and Bounds description of the property from the relevant land records, deed, or survey. The description should include a sequence of individual measurements, directions, and boundary points.
2. **Identify the Starting Point:** Identify the starting point of the land description, often referred to as the point of beginning (POB). This point serves as the reference point for all subsequent measurements and directions.
3. **Plot the Starting Point:** Using a scaled map or graph paper, locate and mark the starting point of the property accurately. This point will be the base from which the land description is drawn.

2nd I lay off and allot to my beloved wife Keziah Henley about **one hundred and twenty acres of land on Caraway** in my home plantation containing my...

...beginning in the **original line a white creek** and run **west to...** at the **lane barn thirty-two chains & thirty-five links**, thence **North seventy-four degrees west crossing the creek seventeen chains** to thence **North fifty-seven degrees west seven chains & fifty links** to a **white oak** thence **North thirty degrees east fifteen chains and twenty-five links** to a **white hickory on the branch** thence **east six chains & seventy-five links** to a **hickory** thence **north eleven chains & twenty-five** to a **sourwood** at **Nixon's Henley's fence**, thence **north eighty-four degrees east ten chains & Fifty links** to an **ash** thence **north seventy degrees east four...**

Location – Direction - Distance

4. **Plot the Bearings and Distances:** Begin plotting the subsequent bearings (directions) and distances as specified in the Metes and Bounds description. Use a protractor or compass to measure and draw the specified angles or directions from the starting point. Use a ruler or scale to measure and draw the distances according to the given measurements.
5. **Add Boundary Points:** As you progress through the Metes and Bounds description, continue to plot the boundary points by connecting the endpoints of each line segment or boundary specified. Mark each boundary point on the map or graph paper.
6. **Include Natural or Man-Made Features:** If the Metes and Bounds description includes reference to natural or man-made features, such as rivers, roads, fences, or landmarks, incorporate these elements into the drawing. Use symbols or labels to indicate their presence and position relative to the property boundaries.
7. **Close the Loop:** Once all the bearings, distances, and boundary points have been plotted, ensure that the description closes and returns to the starting point. The final boundary point should coincide with the point of beginning, creating a closed polygon.
8. **Label the Drawing:** Label the drawn land description with relevant information, including the property's name or reference, the date of the survey or deed, the owner's name, and any additional details deemed necessary.
9. **Review and Verify:** Review the drawn land description carefully, ensuring accuracy and adherence to the specifications of the Metes and Bounds description. Verify that the shape, size, and dimensions align with the written description.
10. **Create a Legible Final Copy:** Once the drawing is complete and verified, create a clear and legible final copy of the land description drawing. This final copy can be used for reference, documentation, or legal purposes.



Software Can Help

I use [Deed Mapper \(by Direct Line Software\)](#). It has a little bit of a learning curve, but the developer has tutorials. They also have a [Deed Mapper Facebook page](#).

Conclusion on Metes & Bounds

It's important to note that metes and bounds measurements are typically expressed in terms of whole numbers and fractions rather than decimal units. This can make converting them to modern metric measurements somewhat challenging. However, the equivalents provided above will help give a general idea of the conversion.

When working with metes and bounds descriptions, it's recommended to consult resources specific to the region and era you are researching, as there may be variations in the measurements used in different areas.

Searching for Land Records in State Land States

Records for the State Land States, which are the states where the state government originally retained ownership of the land, can be found in various repositories and sources. Here are some common places to find records for State Land States:

1. **State Archives:** State archives often hold a wealth of land-related records for State Land States. These archives may have land grants, deeds, surveys, land patents, and other documents related to land ownership and transactions. Contact the state archives or visit their website to access their collections and resources.
2. **State Land Offices or Departments of Natural Resources:** State agencies responsible for managing state-owned lands, such as State Land Offices or Departments of Natural Resources, may have records and information related to state land ownership. These offices can provide access to land records, land use permits, maps, and other relevant documents.
3. **County Recorder's Offices:** County recorder's offices maintain records of property transactions, including deeds, mortgages, and liens. These offices can provide information on land ownership and transfers within a specific county. Contact the county recorder's office in the county where the land is located to access their records.
4. **County Clerk's Offices:** County clerk's offices may also have land-related records, including property deeds, mortgages, and land surveys. These offices often handle records related to land transactions and can be a valuable source of information on land ownership within a county.
5. **Historical Societies and Libraries:** Local historical societies and libraries in State Land States may house collections of historical land records, including indexes, abstracts, maps, and other resources. These institutions can provide access to valuable local land-related records and materials.
6. **Online Databases and Websites:** Many State Land States have digitized their land records and made them available through online databases or state-specific websites. These platforms can provide access to searchable indexes, digital copies of land records, and other land-related resources. State and county websites may also provide information and guidance on accessing land records.
7. **Title Companies:** Title companies may have historical land records, particularly for more recent transactions. Contact local title companies to inquire about their records and whether they can provide information on land ownership and transfers.

It's important to note that the availability and accessibility of land records can vary from one state to another, and even within different counties or municipalities. Researchers should consult with local experts, repositories, and government offices specific to the State Land State and county they are researching to determine the best sources and methods for accessing land records.

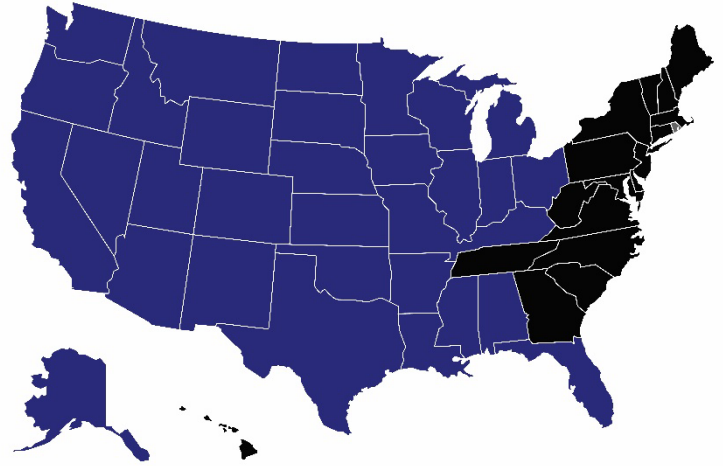
Federal Land States

General Land Office (GLO)

Website is <https://gloreCORDS.blm.gov/>

The General Land Office (a.k.a. Bureau of Land Management) has records dating back to 1788 until the present day.

The Federal Land States, also known as the Public Domain States, are the states in the United States where the federal government originally retained ownership of the land. These states were created from the public domain and were not formed from existing colonies or territories. The Federal Land States are:



Alabama	Iowa	New Mexico
Alaska	Kansas	North Dakota
Arizona	Louisiana	Ohio
Arkansas	Michigan	Oklahoma
California	Minnesota	Oregon
Colorado	Mississippi	South Dakota
Florida	Missouri	Utah
Idaho	Montana	Washington
Illinois	Nebraska	Wisconsin
Indiana	Nevada	Wyoming

These states were initially surveyed and divided into townships, ranges, and sections under the Public Land Survey System (PLSS), administered by the General Land Office (GLO). The federal government gradually transferred ownership of the land to individuals, states, or other entities through various means, including land sales, land grants, homestead programs, and other settlement acts.

Public Land Survey System (PLSS)

The Public Land Survey System (PLSS) is a method used in the United States to survey and divide land parcels in areas that were federally owned or acquired by the government. The PLSS was established to facilitate the orderly distribution and sale of public land, particularly in the western territories. Here's how the PLSS worked:

Initial Point

The PLSS survey began at a designated "Initial Point," which served as a reference point for the entire survey. This point was typically a prominent natural feature or a monument, and it marked the starting point for measuring and subdividing land.

Baselines and Meridians

From the Initial Point, the PLSS established baselines and principal meridians. Baselines are east-west lines, and principal meridians are north-south lines. These lines created a grid system for measuring and locating land parcels.

Ranges and Townships

The PLSS divided land into rectangular units called "townships." Each township measured 6 miles by 6 miles (36 square miles) and was further divided into 36 sections, each measuring 1 mile by 1 mile (640 acres). Ranges and townships formed a grid system, with ranges running north to south and townships running east to west.

Section Lines

Each section within a township was divided by north-south and east-west lines, called "section lines," forming a grid of 36 equal-sized sections within a township. Section lines were located every mile in a north-south and east-west direction, resulting in sections that were each 1 square mile (640 acres).

Section Numbering

Sections within a township were numbered from 1 to 36, starting in the northeast corner and progressing in a serpentine or "snake-like" pattern. For example, section 1 was located in the northeast corner, section 2 to the east of section 1, section 3 to the south of section 2, and so on until section 36 in the southwest corner.

Land Descriptions

Land parcels were described using the PLSS system. A typical land description might include the township number, range number, section number, and any additional information regarding fractional sections or specific portion designations (e.g., "NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 7"). This system provided a precise way to locate and describe land parcels within the PLSS grid.

Land Sales and Patents

Land within the PLSS was made available for purchase or granted by the federal government through land offices. Once a land parcel was sold or granted, a patent or deed was issued to the individual or entity receiving ownership rights.

The PLSS played a significant role in the settlement, development, and administration of public lands in the United States. It provided a systematic and uniform method for surveying and dividing land, enabling efficient land sales and private ownership. While the PLSS is most commonly associated with western states, it was also used in other parts of the country, particularly in areas where public land was available for settlement or sale.

Searching for Land Records in Federal Land States

First try the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) aka General Land Records for Federal Land state records. Website is <https://gloreCORDS.blm.gov/>

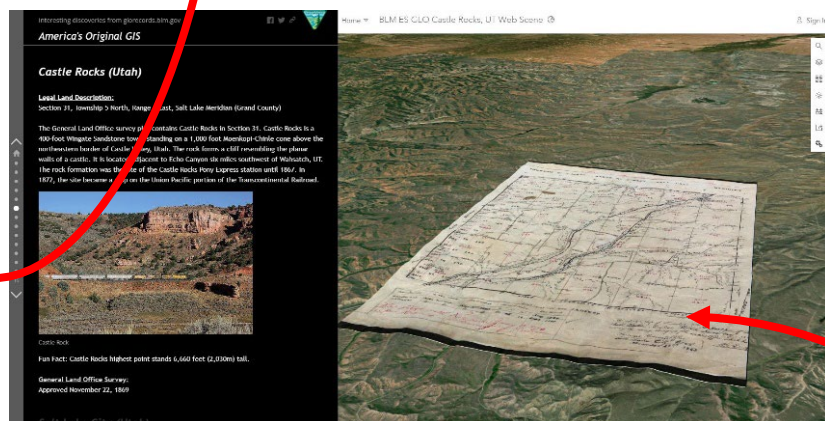
Searching the GLO website is very easy.

Once you find the records, be sure to search and understand the **blue links** (on the left) and get familiar with the **tabs across the top**.

Start with **Patents** and **Surveys**. Searching here is easy and has often netted the results I sought.

Make sure you look at the **Related Documents** tab once you find your ancestors' property.

You can even overlay *some* (not all) maps on Google Earth as shown here.



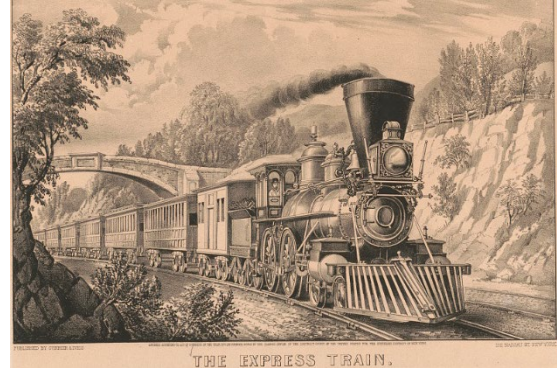
Railroads

The railroad expansion westward in the 1800s played a pivotal role in the sale of land and the settlement of the western territories in the United States. Here's how the railroad expansion intersected with the sale of land:

Transportation Infrastructure

The construction of railroads created a vast network of transportation infrastructure that connected the eastern and western parts of the country. Prior to the

railroad era, travel and transportation across long distances were challenging and time-consuming. The railroads significantly improved accessibility to the western territories, making it easier for settlers, investors, and land speculators to reach and explore those areas.



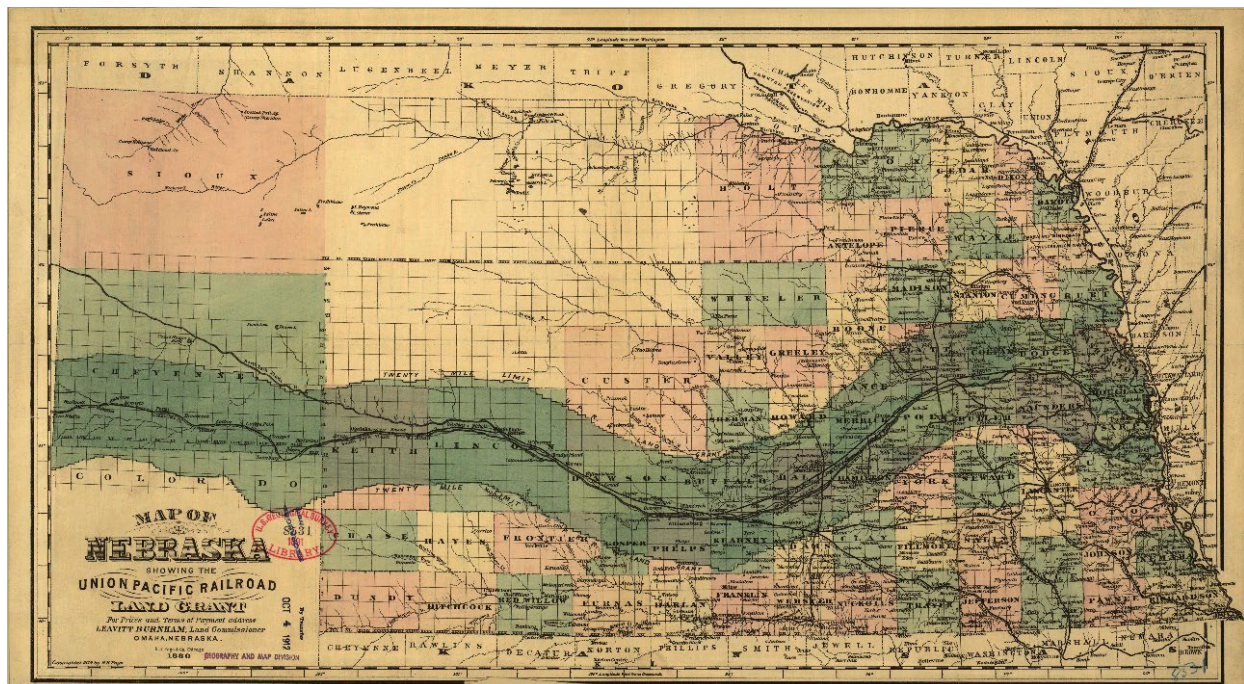
3 LOC.gov

Land Grants

To incentivize railroad construction, the U.S. government provided land grants to railroad companies. These land grants gave railroad companies large tracts of public land along the proposed railroad routes. The companies could then sell or develop the land to finance the construction of the rail lines.

Selling Land to Settlers

The railroads played a vital role in marketing and selling land to settlers. They often employed land agents and established land offices to promote and facilitate the sale of land along their railroad routes. The railroads advertised the benefits of settling in the western territories, such as fertile soil, opportunities for farming, business prospects, and access to transportation.



Land Grants for Right-of-Way

In addition to the land grants, the railroads also received right-of-way grants, which allowed them to acquire the necessary land for constructing and operating the rail lines. These grants provided the railroads with a clear and legal path for laying tracks across public and private lands.

Increased Land Value

The presence of railroads had a significant impact on the value of land. As railroads were constructed and expanded, the areas along the rail lines experienced a surge in land value. This increase in land value attracted settlers, investors, and businesses, leading to further development and economic growth in those regions.

Town Development

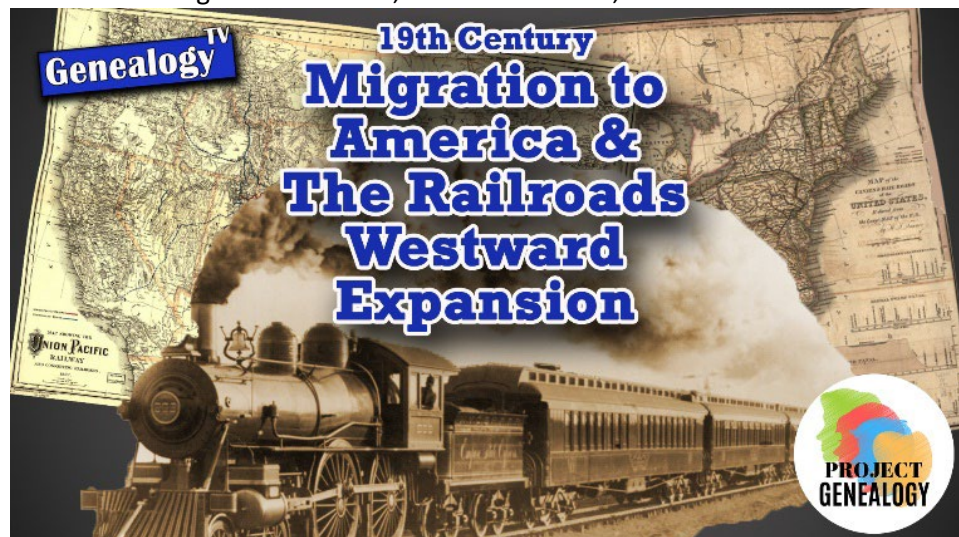
Railroads often played a central role in the establishment and growth of towns and cities. Towns would spring up along the railroad lines, serving as transportation hubs, trade centers, and places of residence for railroad workers and settlers. The railroads would often provide land for town sites or establish their own planned communities.

Government Land Sales

The federal government, through the General Land Office (GLO), continued to sell public land to individuals and companies during the railroad expansion. This land was often available for purchase through public auctions or at set prices per acre. The railroads themselves, through their land grants, were significant purchasers of public land.

The railroad expansion in the 1800s not only provided the means for settlers and investors to reach the western territories but also played a crucial role in the marketing, sale, and development of land in those areas. The railroads facilitated the growth of towns, attracted settlers, and contributed to the transformation of the western territories into settled and productive regions of the United States.

To learn more about the railroads and the Western Migration see this video on Genealogy TV's YouTube channel.



[19th Century Migration to America & The Railroads Westward Expansion Video \(YouTube\)](#)

Find [Railroad Maps, 1828-1900 here](#) at LOC.gov (Library of Congress).

Land Grants

Land Grants for Military Service

In the United States, land grants were awarded for various purposes throughout its history. Here are some of the major types of land grants and the reasons behind their issuance:

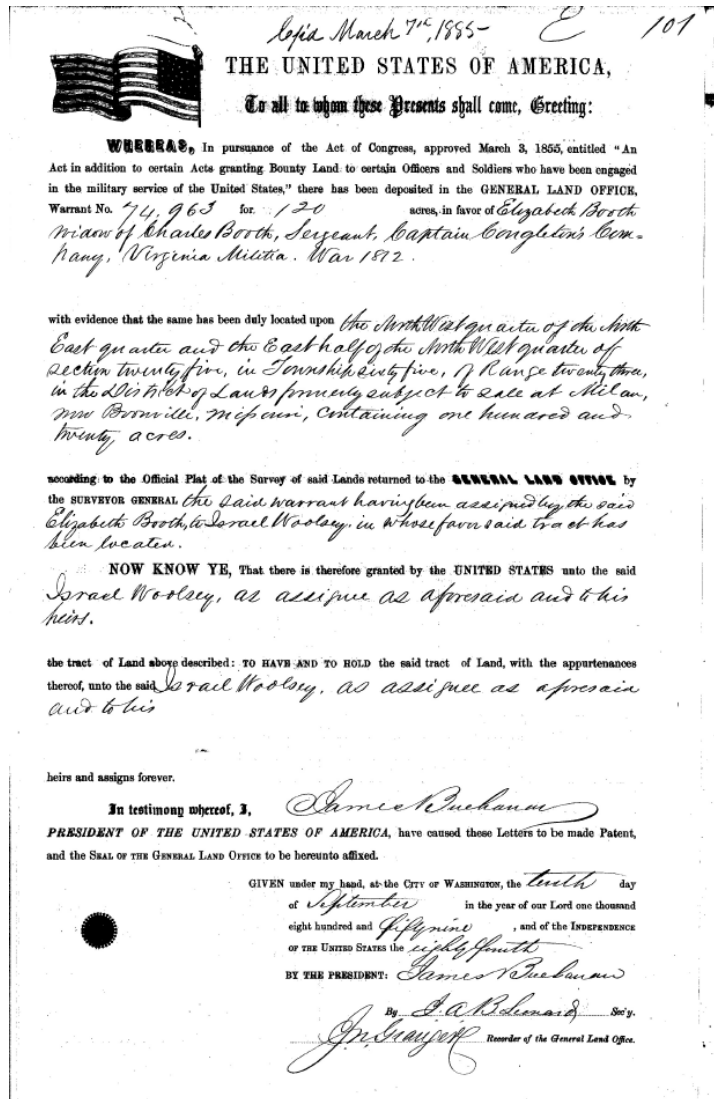
1. **Spanish Land Grants:** During the Spanish colonial period, land grants were given to individuals and groups for colonization, agricultural development, and military service. These grants were used to encourage settlement and economic activities in the Spanish territories, such as present-day Florida, Texas, California, and the southwestern states.
2. **French Land Grants:** French land grants were primarily issued in areas that were part of French colonial possessions, including parts of the Mississippi River Valley and the Great Lakes region. The French Crown awarded land grants to fur traders, explorers, and settlers to promote trade and settlement in these territories.
3. **Mexican Land Grants:** After gaining independence from Spain, Mexico continued the practice of granting land to individuals and communities. Mexican land grants aimed to encourage settlement, ranching, and agricultural activities in the Mexican territories, including what is now California, Texas, and parts of the southwestern states.
4. **Preemption Act of 1841:** The Preemption Act allowed settlers who had already made improvements on public lands to purchase those lands at a minimum price before they were offered to the general public. The act aimed to provide security to early settlers and encourage the development of public lands.
5. **Homestead Acts:** The Homestead Acts, beginning with the Homestead Act of 1862, granted free land to settlers who met certain requirements. Under these acts, eligible individuals, including farmers, laborers, and immigrants, could claim up to 160 acres of public land. The purpose was to encourage westward expansion, settlement, and agriculture in the frontier areas of the United States.
6. **Railroad Land Grants:** To encourage the construction of railroads, the federal government provided vast land grants to railroad companies. These grants often consisted of alternating sections of land along the proposed rail routes. The railroads could sell or develop the land to finance the construction of the rail lines, which played a crucial role in the westward expansion and economic development of the country.
7. **Military Bounty Land Grants:** Various laws granted land to soldiers and veterans as a reward for military service. These grants were often given as compensation for their service and to provide them with opportunities for settlement or agriculture.
8. **Swamp Land Grants:** The Swamp Land Acts of the mid-19th century granted swamp and overflowed lands to states to be reclaimed and made suitable for agriculture. These grants aimed to stimulate economic development by converting wetlands into productive farmland.
9. **Scrip Warrants and Scrip Certificates:** In certain circumstances, the federal government issued scrip warrants or certificates that could be exchanged for public land. This was often done as compensation for various claims or as a means of resolving disputes.

Widows Land Grant Applications for Husbands of Military Service

Widows' Pension Applications for Land were a form of compensation provided to the widows of military veterans in the United States. These applications allowed eligible widows to apply for land grants as a pension for the service and sacrifice of their deceased husbands. The availability of widows' land applications varied depending on the military conflicts in which the husbands had served.

Here are some notable military conflicts and their corresponding widows' land application programs:

1. **Revolutionary War:** After the American Revolutionary War, the U.S. government recognized the need to support the widows of soldiers who had fought for independence. The federal government enacted various laws and acts to grant land to the widows of Revolutionary War veterans. The most well-known program was the "Widows' Half-Pay Act," which granted half-pay pensions for life to the widows of officers and enlisted soldiers who had served in the Continental Army.
2. **War of 1812:** The widows of soldiers who served in the War of 1812 were also eligible for land grants as pensions. The "Widows' Land Act of 1812" provided 160 acres of land to the widows of soldiers who had died in service or as a result of their service during the war.
3. **Mexican-American War:** Widows of soldiers who served in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) were entitled to land grants as part of their pension benefits. The "Widows' and Orphans' Act of 1848" provided 160 acres of public land to the widows and orphans of deceased soldiers who had served in the conflict.
4. **Civil War:** The Civil War (1861-1865) led to significant developments in widows' pension programs. The "Widows' Pension Act of 1862" granted pensions to widows and dependents of soldiers who died or were killed in service during the war. This included the provision of land grants to eligible widows.
5. **Indian Wars:** The widows of soldiers who served in the various conflicts and campaigns against Native American tribes in the Western territories, often referred to as the Indian Wars, were



also eligible for land grants as part of their pensions. These grants were provided through specific acts and legislation addressing the compensation of widows of Indian War veterans.

It's important to note that the specific details and eligibility criteria for widows' land applications varied among the different conflicts and acts. The acreage granted and the application process may have differed depending on the time and the specific laws in place. Researchers interested in widows' land applications should consult historical records, pension files, and relevant legislation specific to the time and conflict in question to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the programs available to widows during those times.

Headrights Land Grants

Headrights were a system of land grants used in colonial America to encourage the settlement and development of the English colonies. Under the headright system, individuals or groups were granted land by the colonial government based on the number of people they brought into the colony.

Patrick Henley proved 22 rights, Pasquotank: Jno. Culpepper, Jno. Robison, Yacko and Grace 2 negroes, Valentine Byrd, Sarah Byrde, Betty, Bes, Mingo, and Tom, 4 Negroes, Andrew, Yampo, Marea and [torn] negroes, Anne Farmer, Patrick Henley, Mary Henley, his wife, Mary Henley, [torn], Betty a negroe, my wife Sarah Henley, Margret Byrde. Certified 7 [torn] 1693/4. A warrant Given.

Albemarle. Patrick Henley, 1100 a., 3 Mar. 1693. the persons viz. Jno. Culpeper, Jno. Robison, Jacko, Grace, 2 Negroes Valentine Bird, betty, bes, Mingo, and Tom Negroes, Andrew, Jumbo, Maria, Jane, An Farmer, Pa. Henley, Eliz. Duff, betty negro, Sarah Henley Margrett Byrd Sarah Byrd, 22 Survey for Stephen Scott, assignee of Patrick Henley, 247 a., 12 June 1696.

Above you can see two references from a book that shows Patrick Henley proved 22 rights (imported people) and received 1100 acres of land as part of the Headrights incentive program. It should be noted that he listed slaves as well as two wives. Mary had died two years previous to this application.

Here are some key points about headrights in colonial America:

Purpose and Inception: Headrights were introduced to attract settlers to the colonies, increase the population, and stimulate economic growth. The concept originated in the Virginia Colony in 1618, under the authority of the Virginia Company, to address labor shortages and incentivize migration.

Allotment of Land: A headright grant typically entitled the recipient to a specified amount of land. In early Virginia, the standard headright was 50 acres per person brought into the colony. Over time, the amount of land granted per headright varied among the colonies and could increase or decrease depending on factors such as the colony's needs, land availability, and specific regulations.

Qualifications for Headrights: To qualify for a headright, an individual had to meet certain criteria. Typically, they needed to be a free adult (usually male) intending to settle in the colony and remain there for a specified period. Some colonies also granted headrights to indentured servants, who would receive the land once they completed their term of service.

Methods of Acquiring Headrights: Headrights could be acquired in different ways. Individuals or families who paid for their own passage to the colony were entitled to their own headrights. Wealthier individuals or groups could also pay for the passage of others, known as

³ North Carolina Headrights: A list of Names, 1663-1744, by Caroline B. Whitley, pgs. 89 & 169.

"transportation," headrights, and claim the corresponding land grants. In some cases, land could be acquired through headrights obtained by marrying a person already in the colony.

Transferability and Assignment: Headrights were often transferable, meaning they could be sold or assigned to others. Landowners could sell their headrights to individuals who wished to claim the associated land. This allowed for the development of a land market where headrights became a form of currency.

Impact on Settlement: The headright system played a significant role in shaping the settlement patterns of colonial America. It encouraged the migration of individuals and families, resulting in the establishment of new settlements and the expansion of existing ones. The system contributed to the colonization of vast areas of land, particularly in Virginia, Maryland, and other southern colonies.

Evolution and Abolition: Over time, the headright system underwent changes and modifications in different colonies. Some colonies, such as Maryland, introduced special headrights for specific groups, such as Protestant immigrants or religious dissenters. Eventually, the headright system began to decline and was phased out as land became more limited, and other methods of land distribution, such as land sales and land grants, gained prominence.

The headright system played a crucial role in encouraging migration, populating the colonies, and promoting land settlement in colonial America. It was an important mechanism for distributing land and stimulating economic development during the early years of English colonization.

Where to Find the Records by Century

A genealogist can find land records in various repositories and sources, depending on the time and location of their research. Here is a list of potential sources for land records, organized by century, starting with Colonial America:

Colonial America (17th and 18th centuries):

1. **County Courthouses:** Land records were often recorded and maintained at the county level. Genealogists can visit county courthouses or contact the relevant county clerk's office to access land records, including deeds, land grants, and surveys.
2. **State Archives:** State archives may house land records from the colonial period. Researchers can explore the archives' collections, which often include land patents, grants, and early land-related documents.
3. **Historical Societies:** Local and regional historical societies might hold collections of land records, including indexes, abstracts, and transcriptions of colonial-era land transactions.
4. **Online Databases:** Some online platforms, such as FamilySearch, Ancestry, and local or state-specific websites, offer digitized and indexed land records from the colonial period. One should always seek the original records, if possible.

19th Century:

1. County Recorder's Office: Land records for the 19th century are typically found at county recorder's offices or county clerk's offices. These records include deeds, mortgages, land grants, and other land-related documents.
2. Bureau of Land Management (BLM): For lands acquired through federal government programs like the Homestead Acts, the BLM's General Land Office (GLO) can provide access to land entry case files, patents, and surveys.
3. State Archives and Libraries: State repositories often house land records for the 19th century. State archives and libraries may have collections of land-related documents, including land grants, patents, and indexes.
4. Online Databases: Online platforms like FamilySearch, Ancestry, and county or state websites might have digitized land records for the 19th century. Some state or county specific websites provide access to searchable databases of land records often dating back to the founding of the territory.

20th Century and beyond:

1. County Recorder's Office: Land records for the 20th century are typically maintained at county recorder's offices or county clerk's offices. These records include deeds, mortgages, and other land-related documents.
2. Online Databases: Many counties and states have digitized their land records and made them available through online databases. These databases can be accessed through county or state websites.
3. Title Companies: Title companies might have historical land records, especially for more recent transactions. Genealogists can contact local title companies to inquire about accessing their records.
4. Online Mapping and Parcel Search Tools: Some counties provide online mapping and parcel search tools that allow users to view land records, property boundaries, and ownership information for specific parcels of land.

ABSTRACT OF TITLES

BLOCK NO. 266 In Redman's Addition

NO. OF PAGES	GRANTOR	GRANTEE	RECORD	DATE OF INSTRUMENT				DATE OF FILING	CLASSIFICATION OF INSTRUMENT	CONSIDERATION		REMARKS	
				MO.	DAY	YEAR	MO.			DAY	YEAR		DOLLARS
229	1307 United States	W.D. Redman	B	27	Apr.	20	1875	Apr. 27	1875	Patent			
230	1308 W.D. Redman	W. C. Redman	B	28	June	26	1875	June 26	1875	Warr.	5000 00		
231	W.D. Redman	Public Use	Plat	1	Dec.	20	1875	Dec. 20	1875	Deed			
232	2334 W. C. Redman, et ux	G.W. Clark	B	609	June	6	1879	June 10	1879	Warr.	100 00		
233	2742 G.W. Clark	Mrs. S.N. Clark	C	34	Oct.	28	1879	Oct. 31	1879	Claim	400 00		
234	2899 W. H. Redman, et ux	Harry Clark	C	139	May	17	1880	May 17	1880	Warr.	176 00		
235	3495 Mrs. S.S. Clark	G.W. Clark	B	297	May	6	1881	May 7	1881	Release	100 00		
236	3496 Mrs. S.S. Clark	G.W. Clark	C	384	Apr.	1	1881	May 7	1881	Deed	100 00		
237	3891 G.W. Clark	Harry Clark	C	555	Dec.	16	1881	Dec. 19	1881	Warr.	100 00		
238	3892 Master Harry Clark &	Miss. Effie L. Jackson	C	557	Dec.	19	1881	Dec. 19	1881	Warr.	100 00		
239	3893 Miss. Effie L. Jackson	G.W. Clark	C	558	Dec.	20	1881	Dec. 20	1881	Claim	1 00		
240	4111 W.D. Redman	Patrick Warrell	P	40	June	18	1881	Apr. 23	1882	Warr.	35 00		
241	4204 W. H. Redman	Narah Walball	P	119	July	3	1882	July 22	1882	Warr.	100 00		
242	4478 W. H. Redman	Charles H. Clark	P	189	Nov.	11	1882	Nov. 11	1882	Warr.	35 00		
243	(formerly Brown)	Chas. H. Clark	Trust	40	Jan.	16	1883	Jan. 16	1883	Deed	140 00		
244	4610 Mrs. Emma Thayer,	Trustee, for S.S. & S. Ann.		40	Mar.	1	1883	Mar. 1	1883	Deed	2000 00		
245	4707 Patrick & Bridget Carroll	James Serran	P	662	July	23	1883	Mar. 17	1884	Warr.	60 00		
246	5300 W. H. Redman	James Serran	G	246	Mar.	20	1885	Nov. 2	1885	Warr.	80 00		
247	6404 W. H. Redman	James Serran	C	48	Dec.	3	1886	Dec. 5	1886	Warr.	400 00		
248	6470 G.W. Clark	G.W. Humby	H	77	Mar.	19	1886	Apr. 27	1886	Warr.	550 00		
	6846 Madeline Walball	Lawrence Johnson	P	47	Mar.	22	1886	Apr. 27	1886	Warr.	480 00		
	6848 Lawrence Johnson	Madeline Walball	P	47	Mar.	22	1886	Apr. 27	1886	Warr.	500 00		
	8143 G.W. Clark	Edmond Irwin	C	217	Apr.	11	1887	Apr. 15	1887	Warr.	500 00		
	8203 W. H. Redman	Wm. Leglar	H	505	Apr.	27	1887	Apr. 27	1887	Warr.	1300 00		
	8644 L. Lawrence Johnson, et ux	Michael Parlane S.S. & Co.	A	565	June	18	1887	June 15	1887	Trust	600 00		
	8645 Anker P. Johnson, et ux	Matthew Serran, for Trust Co.	A	569	June	23	1887	July 23	1887	Trust	600 00		
	8651 Jas. Serran, et ux	Wm. Loan & Trust Co.	B	48	Aug.	1	1887	Aug. 1	1887	Deed	400 00		
	8791 Chas. H. Clark	Jane Irwin	G	48	Aug.	10	1887	Aug. 20	1887	Deed	2000 00		
	8792 Harry Clark	Chas. H. Clark	E	88	Aug.	17	1887	Aug. 26	1887	Deed	1 00		
	8998 Albany Co. S.L.W. R. Ann.	Patrick Carroll, et ux	E	176	Sept.	20	1887	Oct. 3	1887	Release	1 00		
	10882 Jas. Serran, et ux	Sherley & Young, for Trust Co.	B	47	Dec.	29	1888	Dec. 31	1888	Trust	500 00		
	11842 Anker P. Johnson, et ux	Sherley & Young Trust Co.	B	113	Dec.	29	1888	Dec. 31	1888	Trust	176 00		
	11903 John H. Davis, et ux	Anker P. Johnson, et ux	B	178	Oct.	19	1889	Oct. 19	1889	Warr.	48 48		
	12056 H. Warren, Trustee	Sherley & Young	M	180	May	1	1890	May 3	1890	Trustee	776 00		
	18892 Sherley & Young, Trustees	Wm. Investment Co.	M	874	Sept.	1	1890	Sept. 2	1890	Warr.	8605 85		
	18924 Wm. Investment Co.	Sherley & Young, Trustees	I	154	Sept.	1	1890	Sept. 2	1890	Trust	2179 21		
	18928 G.W. Clark	Jane Irwin	M	438	Feb.	6	1891	Feb. 11	1891	Deed	700 00		

It's important to note that the availability and accessibility of land records can vary from one jurisdiction to another. Researchers should consider both physical and online sources and consult local experts or

repositories to determine the specific locations of land records for their research area and time period of interest.

Strategies for Searching for Land Records

You need to **think strategically** when looking for land records. You need to start with something (name, rough dates, type of record you seek). You need to know when and where someone lived in that place.

- Were they part of a military action?
- Did they live in a time period when land grants were prevalent?
- Did they inherit land?
- How did they acquire the land? (If you know)
- Did they sell land?
- Did they foreclose on property?
- Were they landlords?

Thinking strategically about your ancestor will help you determine which set of records to seek. There is no one repository that's going to be a “be all-end all” search for your ancestor.

FamilySearch

[FamilySearch Wiki](#)

At FamilySearch, the best way to go about finding where land records are located is to start with the **FamilySearch Wiki**. The FamilySearch Wiki will tell you whether they have the records or someone else does with links. Start by drilling into the location and then into the land records hyperlink.

Ancestry

While Ancestry has a lot of land records. You are more likely to find more at FamilySearch and more likely at resources outside of family history websites, depending on your location and era.

Search the Card Catalog

Search > Card Catalog > Court, Land, Wills & Financial.

Drill down to the location and era. Then sort by record count for the best results.

Additional Resources

[How Colonists Acquired Title to Land in Virginia](#)

[Homestead Act of 1862 \(National Archives\)](#)

[FamilySearch U.S. Land and Property](#) (More about Federal and State Land States & Homesteads. Drop down to either homestead or drill into the location you are researching.)